



WAY OF CHOICES

BOOK 11

Mao Ni

Epub creation by Lisa Hayes

Way of Choices

(Ze Tian ji)

(择天记)

by

Mao Ni

(猫腻)

Synopsis

To pick is to choose. This is a story about choices. Three thousand worlds full of gods and demons, with a daoist scroll in your hand, you are able to control the entire universe...

At the beginning of time, a mystical meteor came crashing down from outer space and scattered all over the world. A piece of it landed in the Eastern Continent. There were mysterious totems carved upon the meteor. Through viewing these totems, mankind comprehended the Dao and established the Orthodoxy.

Several thousand years later, the fourteen years old orphan Chen Changsheng left his master to cure his illness and change his fate. He brought a part of a marriage vow with him to the capital, thus beginning the journey of a rising hero...

Copyright

All rights reserved.

English Translation Hypersheep325; Pipipingu, Translator Emeritus @ [Binggo&Corp Translations](#)

Translations Edits by bbkgs @ [Binggo&Corp Translations](#)

ePub conversion by Lisa Hayes @ [Hasseno Blog](#)

This is a free eBook. You are free to give it away (in unmodified form) to whomever you wish.

No part of this eBook may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by any information storage and retrieval system, without written permission from the author.

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

Chapter 1001 – Even if You Hear the Real Story, What Can You Do?

After Bie Yanghong's death, Wuqiong Bi became somewhat demented.

Her hair fell loose behind her as she sat against the wall and hugged Bie Yanghong's body to her chest. She did not let anyone approach her, much less move the body.

Chen Changsheng and Xuanyuan Po stood at the door, watching this sight, not knowing what to do.

Bie Yanghong and Wuqiong Bi were both experts of the Divine Domain, perhaps the most famous couple on the continent.

The entire continent knew that this couple had shared a deep affection, and the entire continent had no idea why.

Put more accurately, the entire continent never understood why Bie Yanghong treated Wuqiong Bi so well.

Neither the Tianhai Divine Empress nor Wang Po understood.

Because they could not understand, they and the common people felt injustice in Bie Yanghong's place.

Before leaving, Bie Yanghong had told Chen Changsheng a very simple story, but Chen Changsheng still found it impossible to understand.

He knew what sort of feeling love was.

He loved Xu Yourong, so deeply loved her that there was no space in his heart left for any other scenery, not if it was the Garden of Zhou, the storm on the Bridge of Helplessness, or the twilight of Holy Maiden Peak. Yet he still could not understand.

'If your wife treated you extremely well but had a poor personality, or was an evil and wicked person, what would you

do?'

He recalled Bie Yanghong's question.

If Xu Yourong were an evil and wicked person, what would he do?

He did not know.

He looked into the room.

Wuqiong Bi's hair draped down, its black now gray, her expression one of extreme despair.

At this sight, Chen Changsheng felt pity, but also discomfort. In brief, he felt a variety of emotions.

Xuanyuan Po was a very simple person, so he would not think about things that were too complicated.

When Wuqiong Bi wanted to destroy the Orthodox Academy, he had been the person closest to death.

He naturally did not like this Daoist nun.

He had interacted with Bie Yanghong for a very short time, but he deeply admired him, wanted to get closer to him, wanted to make him his master.

But he would not change his attitude towards Wuqiong Bi because of this. On the contrary, he loathed her even more, especially after seeing those quarrels.

The more he liked Bie Yanghong, the more he hated Wuqiong Bi.

The more beautiful, the more ugly.

Positions truly were relative. All things and sentiments in the world were relative.

.....

.....

Wuqiong Bi raised her head to Xuanyuan Po and saw the

emotions in his eyes. She asked, "You hate me?"

Xuanyuan Po was quiet for a while, then answered, "Yes, because I don't understand why you are alive, but he is dead. This is not fair."

With an impassive visage, Wuqiong Bi said, "Good people don't live long while evil lives for a thousand years. Do you not even understand this principle?"

Xuanyuan Po didn't know how to respond, making him feel even more depressed.

Chen Changsheng shook his head.

A hint of derision flashed through Wuqiong Bi's face. "The two of you want to know why he treated me so well?"

Xuanyuan Po's gaze moved from the still-steaming buns to Bie Yanghong's face while he thought about how to take his senior's body from the hands of this madwoman. He paid no attention to her, and Chen Changsheng also said nothing.

Wuqiong Bi sneered, "This is an extremely old story. If none of you ask, I certainly don't have the energy to recall it."

"Sir Bie already told us, while you were sleeping."

Chen Changsheng paused, then added, "If you wish to add to it, then please."

"He was saved by my father from poverty. At the time, he was as thin as a monkey and ferociously hungry. His throat had also been injured by an old beggar, so even when I offered my favorite soup-filled buns to him, he couldn't eat them. Even now, I still can't forget that starving and suffering figure. In the end, I tore open that entire tray of buns, squeezing out the meat juices inside into a bowl. I slowly had him drink it, saving his life."

Wuqiong Bi's expression became rather desolate as she said, "Later on, he told me that he swore an oath on that bowl of meat

juice that he would treat me well for the rest of his life. No matter what happened, he would never blame me. No matter what dangers I encountered, he would also stand guard in front of me."

Chen Changsheng was quiet for a while, then said, "I think he did it."

"Yes, he really did do it. The good I did for him doesn't amount to even one percent of the good he returned to me. I know that no one likes me, and I even know that he would place the blame on himself. He would say that he had spent seventy years under a different identity, garrisoned at Blue Pass and rarely returning home, so he wasn't able to see my father at his last moments, wasn't there for me when I had a miscarriage, which in turn led to the great change in my personality..."

Wuqiong Bi's voice was suddenly filled with resentment. "But so what? He said that he would accompany me for my entire life, but hasn't he left before me just the same!"

Xuanyuan Po couldn't understand what she was saying. Senior died; he didn't throw you away. Do you even have to complain about this?

Chen Changsheng understood. "But before he left, he was still worried about you."

"So he said those things before he left, wanted me to change, wanted me to listen to you."

Wuqiong Bi sneered at him, "Did you really think I would be touched by these things and suddenly repent?"

Xuanyuan Po was furious while Chen Changsheng was speechless. He finally found it impossible to understand what this Daoist nun was thinking.

Wuqiong Bi sat Bie Yanghong's body upright. She took a bun from the tray and began to eat.

There was a lot of spicy oil in the beef bun. Although it was no

longer hot, it had not congealed either.

Two streams of red, spicy oil dripped down from the corners of her lips like two trickles of blood. She looked somewhat comical, somewhat repulsive, somewhat terrifying.

Wuqiong Bi had her head lowered, so Chen Changsheng and Xuanyuan Po could not see the ruthlessness emerging in her eyes.

Chen Changsheng was still thinking about what she had just said.

What Bie Yanghong had said to her and his debt to her family were probably true, but why had Bie Yanghong not mentioned it?

He quickly understood the reasoning and sentiment behind it, which perplexed him all the more.

Wuqiong Bi believed that Bie Yanghong had mentioned those things, stating that he had a debt to her family so as to make the world tolerate her more.

But she did not understand, because if Bie Yanghong really did say this, the world would only regard her even more poorly.

Whether it was the initial favor of saving his life or those matters later on, they would just make people feel that she was compelling him to repay her.

Bie Yanghong had chosen a better method. He had not even mentioned these things, only given a very simple story.

He loved her. She was his wife, so he should protect her.

This way, when he left the world, she could still gain a little respect from being his wife, could live a little better.

As death was about to descend, Bie Yanghong was still thinking about how his wife could live better, doing many things for the sake of this goal.

This was naturally what somewhat perplexed Chen Changsheng.

He had a vague understanding of Bie Yanghong and Wuqiong Bi's

relationship. It still had to do with that question.

She loved him, so she treated him well. He also loved her, or at least loved her in the past, so what could he do?

Put justice over love?

Su Li had not been able to kill that Demon Princess, so what could Bie Yanghong do about Wuqiong Bi?

Even if the entire world were about to be destroyed, what could one do?

Chapter 1002 – Go Die, Just Like You Lived

Wuqiong Bi finished eating the bun. She then raised her head to Chen Changsheng and Xuanyuan Po, and asked a question.

"All of you say that I'm a bad person, and I will continue to be a bad person, and what can any of you do about it?"

There was no emotion on her face as she said this, but her eyes were filled with derision and disdain.

Xuanyuan Po said nothing. Chen Changsheng said nothing.

Wuqiong Bi suddenly became angry, sternly shouting, "Are neither of you afraid that I'll cut off Guan Bai's other arm once I've recovered!"

Chen Changsheng remained silent, but Xuanyuan Po asked in disbelief, "How could someone like you be so awful?"

Wuqiong Bi was very satisfied with his response. "No matter how awful I was, he still loved me. Is that not okay?"

She gave a satisfied smile.

Her delicate face was ghastly pale and the drips of red oil looked just like blood, making her appearance abnormally cruel and frightening.

Chen Changsheng stared into her eyes. He guessed at what she wanted to do, a realization that made him very depressed. Rising, he walked out of the room.

Seeing him walk away, Wuqiong Bi revealed an astonished expression as she shouted, "Why are you leaving?"

Xuanyuan Po watched the oil drop from her lips as she spoke. Somewhat angry, he turned around and took two papers, placing them in front of her.

Wuqiong Bi didn't take the papers, instead staring into his eyes. "Do all the beef buns have this much oil?"

Both the question itself and her current expression seemed rather manic.

Xuanyuan Po also found her rather wretched. Suppressing his emotions, he answered, "It's beef fat mixed with peppers. That's how you get the fragrance."

"You clearly know the fragrance of the beef bun, so why did you only let us eat plain steamed buns!"

Wuqiong Bi's voice suddenly turned shrill. As if she had gone crazy, she wailed at Xuanyuan Po.

"He was about to die, so what harm was there in letting him eat beef buns!"

Xuanyuan Po said nothing. It wasn't because he felt that she had gone crazy, but because he also deeply regretted this matter.

In the last few days, he had only bought plain steamed buns for Bie Yanghong and Wuqiong Bi while he ate beef buns.

It wasn't because he couldn't buy them, but because he thought that they should eat plainer food out of concern for their injuries.

But Bie Yanghong had still died. This being the case, why not let him happily eat a few beef buns?

Wuqiong Bi suddenly calmed down and expressionlessly said, "Go die, then."

.....

.....

There was a light clap.

Wuqiong Bi raised her left hand, extending her index finger to Xuanyuan Po.

She was still extremely weak from the loss of her arm, and though Xuanyuan Po was also injured, he could at least move on his own power. It should have been possible for him to avoid this

finger.

But this finger seemed to have some magical power, ignoring Xuanyuan Po's instinctive response. Subtly and precisely, it struck the center of his brow.

This finger seemed to drain Wuqiong Bi of all her strength. Her face turned even more pale, even somewhat transparent.

Xuanyuan Po let out a roar of pain. His body shuddered as it increased in size. His clothes tore apart, black fur bursting out from the seams.

Wuqiong Bi's finger had instantly forced him into berserk metamorphosis!

But he still could not break free of Wuqiong Bi's finger, not even perform a simple action like moving away his head.

The finger remained calmly pressed against the center of his brow like it had been glued there.

Xuanyuan Po had a large and sturdy body, and after berserk metamorphosis, it was like a small mountain. Since he could not pull his brow from Wuqiong Bi's finger, he could no longer maintain his posture, so he fell forward.

Instead of falling on the ground, he floated into the air. He was like a leather bag filled with hot air, Wuqiong Bi's finger the string tied to it.

Chen Changsheng heard the noise from the room and rushed back inside to be greeted by this strange sight.

Wuqiong Bi's finger naturally made him recall Bie Yanghong's finger from yesterday.

Bie Yanghong had used that finger to pour into his sea of consciousness the experience of that battle between the Divine and a great deal of wisdom regarding cultivation.

Wuqiong Bi was now doing something similar, but there was

clearly something different. He could perceive the awe-inspiring majesty of divine Qi and terrifying surges of true essence!

Icy winds howled through the room, ruffling Bie Yanghong's clothes, sweeping up the dregs from the crystals and the splinters from the wooden pagodas. They then began to circle incessantly around Wuqiong Bi and Xuanyuan Po.

In this extremely short span of time, Wuqiong Bi had grown thinner, aged centuries.

Streaks of frost appeared in her hair, her complexion now deathly pale and so thin and transparent that one could almost see the muscles and bones within.

In reality, it was impossible to see, as everything within was pure and divine light.

Her eyes burned with fervor, exploded with madness. She stared at Xuanyuan Po and yelled, "If your luck is bad, go die!"

With this yell, this pure and divine light pierced through her skin, transforming into shards of gold that entered Xuanyuan Po's body.

Xuanyuan Po's body began to tremble, and his withered right arm entered a cycle of breaking and repair. The snapping and popping sounds it emitted were difficult to listen to.

His face was fraught with terrible pain.

Chen Changsheng felt an extreme danger, but he did not dare do anything in these circumstances. He could only nervously wait.

After some time, Wuqiong Bi drew back her finger.

Xuanyuan Po crashed to the ground, smashing out deep wounds on his body and sending blood flying, and then he fell unconscious.

Chen Changsheng rushed to examine the wounds, angrily shouting at Wuqiong Bi, "You've gone crazy!"

He had no idea what she had transmitted to Xuanyuan Po, but

what she had done was clearly many times more dangerous than Bie Yanghong's technique.

In other words, when she shouted at Xuanyuan Po to go die, she truly was not lying.

Chen Changsheng was also well aware that she had said those words before to enrage him so that he would kill her.

Like when she had jeered about suddenly repenting or when she declared that she would cut off Guan Bai's remaining arm.

She had truly gone crazy, but even if she wanted to die, why had she used such a method?

In a daze, Wuqiong Bi sat against the wall. Suddenly, she shrilly called out, "He's gone, so I don't want to live anymore, but I... I'm afraid to die! I really am afraid to die!"

She turned her head with difficulty to look at the lifeless Bie Yanghong. Her voice slightly trembled as she said, "But I still want to be together with you."

She began to cry, weeping for a long time until it became intermittent sobs, and then stopped entirely.

Chen Changsheng felt somewhat stiff as he placed his finger under her nose.

Wuqiong Bi had closed her eyes. Leaning against her man, she was already dead.

Chen Changsheng drew back his finger and looked out at the courtyard.

The courtyard was extremely quiet.

He suddenly felt rather helpless.

Chapter 1003 – Exist or Perish, the Bottom of the Well or Its Mouth?

Bie Yanghong was dead. Wuqiong Bi was also dead. They had died far away from their home, eighty thousand li away, in White Emperor City.

Their souls would return to the sea of stars, not to Xiling's Ten Thousand Years Pavilion, so it was not crucial for them to be buried at any particular place.

There was an extremely deep fissure in the small courtyard, probably made when Chusu had burst out of the ground. It had been repaired by the chill winds from an underground river, its bottom already filled by rocks. All that was left was a pit about two feet deep.

Chen Changsheng placed the bodies of Bie Yanghong and Wuqiong Bi in the pit. Before he had time to fill the pit, a cool breeze blew in from the tree of the Celestial Tree temple. Only two piles of golden sand were left in the pit.

When Zhu Luo died, he had seen a similar sight. He knew that this was a special attribute of Divine Domain experts, so he was not surprised.

But the golden sand in the earth made him recall another matter.

Up to now, many people still believed that the Tianhai Divine Empress had been buried by him deep within the Orthodox Academy. In reality, she was in the Hundred Herb Garden.

Why was it that after the Tianhai Divine Empress's death, her remains had not become the purest golden sand like other experts of the Divine Domain, but still maintained its original appearance?

Was this the difference between the Concealed Divinity Realm and the Saint Realm?

He didn't think any more about this. He waved his sleeve, sending the white stones in the courtyard to fill the pit.

As he watched those golden sands gradually be buried, he silently recited several names.

Chusu, Madam Mu, Black Robe, Sacred Light Continent.

The entire continent sensed the death of the two experts of the Divine Domain. The laws of the heavens and earth responded and omens began to manifest.

In the distant Cloud Grave in the east, eddies began to form and the streams falling from the solitary mountain suddenly began to flow faster.

A one-horned creature drinking at the edge of the stream raised its head and looked into the distance, a hint of loneliness appearing in its sacred and pure eyes.

No waves could be seen on the Red River, and its mirror-like surface looked extremely strange. Low hums came from the Jings deep in the water as if they were lamenting something.

The Archbishop of the Western Wastes, who knew what had happened, sorrowfully gazed at the dark rain clouds over the small courtyard.

Behind the rain clouds, two rainbows appeared, side by side. They stretched out of White Emperor City, crossing over the wide river and towards the distant mountains, perhaps even farther.

Only now did the Demi-human Prime Minister, the Bear tribe leader, and the Shi clan leader understand what had happened. They were stunned and didn't know what to say.

The priests, cultivators, and demi-human soldiers in the alley also knew what those two rainbows signified. One by one, they began to prostrate.

The believers of the Orthodoxy in the crowd began to recite

Daoist scriptures under the guidance of the archbishop, their voices pious and reverent.

.....

.....

Chen Changsheng did not return to the Daoist Church of the Western Wastes. He remained in the small courtyard, as Xuanyuan Po had not woken up yet and there were still some things he needed to think about.

The Demi-human Prime Minister, the Shi clan leader, and other personages had come in succession, wanting to know the particulars of the matter, and more importantly, his current stance. But he did not see them.

The small courtyard once more became extremely silent. He sat on the wooden porch outside the room, his gaze flitting between that listless pine, the white stones, and the gray walls.

He suddenly felt tired, losing interest in many matters. For instance, he clearly knew that the entire Demi-human race was anxiously and warily waiting for his response, but he did not care.

Just like many other people, he adored and respected Bie Yanghong, but he was truly not acquainted with him. Logically speaking, he should not have been so agitated, but this event had truly dealt him a massive psychological blow.

Good people aren't guaranteed to be rewarded, and they might not even live well, so why do we have to be good people? How should we love? Why should we live?

He gazed at the night sky, thinking of these questions that people would often laugh at but would still carefully ponder.

There were no clouds or fog in White Emperor City tonight. His view was unobstructed, allowing him to see far, to see many stars.

Chen Changsheng's spiritual sense departed his body, floating

into the sea of stars. It floated past the star that was sputtering star radiance, past the star with countless spiraling arms, avoided that star sprouting two bright wings, and continued forward. Finally, he went past that invisible crystal wall to the periphery of the sea of stars.

Only when cultivators were fixing their Fated Stars could their spiritual senses travel so far. Normally, cultivators could only sense the existence of their Fated Stars, but they would find it extremely difficult to reach them again.

But this rule had no use on Chen Changsheng, just like how that invisible crystal wall could not keep out his spiritual sense.

Perhaps it was because his spiritual sense had originally come from the other side?

A red star quietly floated in the night sky, brimming with a passionate energy. Its surface was so calm that it seemed like it could experience the passage of millions upon millions of years and not change.

This was his Fated Star.

Chen Changsheng's spiritual sense did not fall upon his Fated Star.

This star was real and was the one closest to him, but he would forever be unable to reach it. Thus, this was the vapidest of realities, one which was liable to make him sad.

He did not want to be sad, so his spiritual sense continued forward, appearing somewhat cold.

Ultimately, his spiritual sense went beyond the sea of stars.

Far away, on the other side, he could see many more stars like the twinkling lights of a city.

Was the Sacred Light Continent there?

He wanted to go and see.

Ever since he had learned of his illness at the age of ten, the only thing he had thought about was surviving.

On that rainy night, the Tianhai Divine Empress had recast his meridians, eliminating his predestined fate. He could live past the age of twenty, could live for many more years.

From that moment, he naturally could begin pondering other questions. Only after wiping away the shadow of death could he truly begin to objectively observe his life.

He naturally wanted to find the origin of his life, find a reason to exist. But the life of tension he had lived the last few years had not left him much time to think.

Only on the night of Bie Yanghong's and Wuqiong Bi's deaths did he truly begin his search.

Between his spiritual sense and that faintly visible sea of stars was an unimaginable vast and cold void, the dark and bottomless abyss.

The black void was even more formless than the spatial wall, so he could not pass through it. It didn't even seem to exist, so how could he overcome it?

Chen Changsheng gazed into the center of the black void and suddenly had a very strange feeling.

He felt like he was standing at the mouth of a well and peering into its depths.

But he also felt like he was standing at the bottom of the well and gazing up at the night sky.

Just which feeling was right? Which one... was real?

No one knew how much time had passed.

Chen Changsheng drew back his spiritual sense.

He was still sitting on the wooden porch. His gaze no longer wandered. It remained fixed on the gray wall, but it was also

looking at many other places.

The sea of stars made one feel serene, and that black void could make all cultivators sense their insignificance, assisting them in wiping away the stray thoughts in their Dao hearts.

Footsteps came from behind him.

Xuanyuan Po walked up and sat down beside him.

Chapter 1004 – Using an Array to Break an Array

Xuanyuan Po was very weak right now, even feebler than he had been in that period in the capital when he was washing dishes, but he was still alive.

And now, his body was packed with a most majestic true essence and a most terrifying divine Qi.

Both had come from Wuqiong Bi's finger.

With enough time, he could make that true essence his own, could comprehend the laws of the world represented in the divine Qi.

At that moment, he would become a true expert.

From a certain perspective, the opportunity Xuanyuan Po had obtained was truly rare, even if one looked across the entire history of cultivation.

But he was not jumping for joy. On the contrary, he was rather depressed.

"Two days ago, Senior taught me some very important things, but I wasn't able to completely learn them and ultimately lost."

Xuanyuan Po lowered his head. "Aren't I very useless?"

"There's no shame in losing to someone like the Demon Lord. Moreover, you succeeding in forcing their under-the-table negotiations to the surface. This is very important."

Chen Changsheng added, "As for the things Senior taught, you still have a long time to learn them. If there's something you don't understand, just ask me."

Xuanyuan Po was somewhat puzzled. "Ask you?"

"Before Senior left, he passed onto me a fist style, specifying that

it was for you."

Grief-stricken, Xuanyuan Po gazed at the small mound in the courtyard quietly for a long time before saying, "I'll study hard."

Chen Changsheng said, "The legacy of both Senior and his wife are now all with you. In the future, when you have the chance, you should go to Ten Thousand Years Pavilion and look around."

Xuanyuan Po replied, "I will go as quickly as possible."

Chen Changsheng stood up and raised his right hand.

Xuanyuan Po bent his waist and lowered his head.

Chen Changsheng patted him on the shoulder and then walked out of the courtyard.

He did not return to the Daoist Church of the Western Wastes to rest, but instead went straight to the Imperial City. After a saddening conversation with Luoluo, he entered that large but concealed secret passage.

Upon his exit from the passage, the snowcapped mountain once more assailed his eyes. But since it was still dark, the light of dawn still distant, the lofty peaks obscured half the starry sky, making it seem like the stars really were falling.

As he crossed the lake and came to the black cliff, Jin Yulu came up to him and asked, "What happened?"

Although this place was far from White Emperor City, they had still been able to sense the phenomena from this morning.

Chen Changsheng explained.

It was extremely quiet beneath the black cliff.

Xiaode gazed at Chen Changsheng with a complicated expression.

Two of humanity's Divine Domain experts had died within White Emperor City. This was certain to have a massive effect on the relationship between the humans and demi-humans.

Xiaode did not know what sort of stance Chen Changsheng would take in the coming turmoil, which made him wary and uneasy.

A hint of fatigue could be seen on Chen Changsheng's face, but no anger, much less rage. He seemed completely unaffected by this matter.

He asked, "Any progress?"

Jin Yulu shook his head. "Your sword could not cut it apart, so there's nothing we can do."

Xiaode suddenly proposed, "I've thought of a way to break the array, but I don't know if it's possible."

Chen Changsheng and Jin Yulu looked to him.

As a true expert ranked second on the Proclamation of Liberation and the strongest of the middle generation of demi-humans, Xiaode naturally possessed a broad range of experiences.

Since this was a method that he had thought of, it undoubtedly had an extremely strong basis, so both Chen Changsheng and Jin Yulu were particularly attentive.

"The Starstone is the array pivot and this seal is a complete array. Since it's an array, it's hard to suppress with strength, so why not use an array to break it?"

Xiaode had so composed an expression that no could tell that he was a little nervous.

Even now, he still did not know who had written those words on that slip of paper or whether that person had good or evil intentions.

Jin Yulu silently considered this proposition for a while, then shook his head. "Using an array to break an array seems reasonable, but arrays have always specialized in defense, so they lack an edge."

Chen Changsheng also considered Xiaode's suggestion. Although

he knew a few arrays, they were far inferior to this sealing array that was keeping the White Emperor imprisoned.

At this moment, he suddenly heard a very familiar phrase.

Xiaode asked, "What if it was a sword array?"

Jin Yulu froze at these words. It seemed more possible the more he thought about it. He excitedly shouted, "Right, the South Stream Temple sword array!"

He turned to Chen Changsheng and said, "We will have to trouble Your Holiness with this matter."

Xiaode also turned to Chen Changsheng.

The entire continent knew of Chen Changsheng's relationship with Holy Maiden Xu Yourong, and it was probably an easy task for him to invite the disciples of South Stream Temple to this place.

"There's no need to go to such lengths."

With a shake of his sleeve, several hundred swords flowed out of Chen Changsheng's sheath like a river. They rushed through the air and took up their respective positions in the night sky.

Jin Yulu and Xiaode were both astonished by this sight.

They had not borne witness to the end of the Heavenly Selection ceremony or Chen Changsheng's battle with the Demon Lord, so this was their first time seeing this sight.

These swords were not completely identical to the sword style from the rumors, and they were even more different from the swords that Xiaode had seen in the alley of the Northern Military Department. If they were just looking at this storm of swords, they would have found it very difficult to guess the name of this sword style, but their conversation just now caused a guess to easily come to mind.

Xiaode stiffly asked, "This is... the South Stream Temple sword

array?"

Chen Changsheng grunted.

Jin Yulu shook his head, both gratified and sentimental. He was like an old wave on a beach, resting and unwilling to rise.

Xiaode became a little apprehensive. He no longer said a word, like an iron tree that was too shy to bloom.

In the past, he had firmly believed that his cultivation level was higher than Chen Changsheng's and that they were equally talented. It was the sword styles Chen Changsheng learned from Su Li that made it impossible for Xiaode to defeat him, and also those lucky encounters in the Garden of Zhou. In short, it was not that his fighting prowess was lacking, but that Chen Changsheng's luck, his fate, was far better than his. But now, the storm of swords in the darkness, the awe-inspiring sword intents, the connections between the sword intents, and the array energy waiting to be activated made it impossible for him to continue saying these words to himself.

In a short few years, Chen Changsheng's cultivation in the sword had reached such a formidable level. How had he managed to do it?

Was it because the Pope had the support of the entire Orthodoxy, or was it because of a simpler and cruder reason?

Was he just this much of a genius?

.....

.....

Knowing that this was what one should do did not mean that one knew what one should do.

Just finding a way for the South Stream Temple sword array to break the seal in the black cliff took Chen Changsheng an hour.

Countless intimidating sword intents flew over the surface of the lake, carrying somewhat cold strands of Qi as they hacked at the

invisible array energy on the perimeter of the black cliff.

The collision with the sword array caused the seal hidden within the mountain to gradually reveal its true appearance.

Deep within the snowy fog, one could faintly see the projection of the Starstone wall blocking the path forward.

As time passed, the bounds of this sealing array grew more and more distinct. It far exceeded the area around the black cliff, covering a circle with a radius of ten-some li.

Several swords of the sword array even flew into the sky, heading off to even taller mountains. Were those peaks also part of the sealing array?

Chapter 1005 – The Darkness in Front of the Imperial City Is Torn Open

Using an array to break an array seemed like a simple idea, but it was actually a genius proposition, so genius that no cultivator had ever dared consider such a possibility.

Intrinsically, this was the most archetypical grinding with water, and also like two bronze mirrors polishing themselves by rubbing against each other.

A normal array would find it impossible to break this great sealing array, but this was because this bronze mirror was excessively smooth, its materials excessively unusual.

But the South Stream Temple sword array was different. This sword array had the hardest and sharpest surface, ideal for grinding things down.

However, even the South Stream Temple sword array would take some time to destroy the sealing array, as meticulous and cautious grinding was needed.

In terms of arrays, Xu Yourong was truly more talented than the vast majority of cultivators in the world, many times more formidable than even someone like Chen Changsheng. But Chen Changsheng was still the best choice for breaking the array. He alone could use the South Stream Temple sword array, and he also had an unfathomable patience.

His eyes were closed as he sat in front of the black cliff. From the pitch-black night to the morning light, he remained calm and serene, with not the slightest anxiety to be spied on his face.

Jin Yulu and Xiaode could see the sword intents filling the sky, and they could also see that the black cliff remained unchanged, so they found it impossible to remain as calm. If their spiritual senses had not been strong enough to sense that the sealing array was

ever so slowly weakening, they might have been even more concerned. When they saw how Chen Changsheng remained calm throughout the entire process, even able to meditate while controlling the South Stream Temple sword array, they felt a deep admiration.

As the morning light flourished, Chen Changsheng opened his eyes. He took a look at the current state of the sealing array and then said, "I need to rest a while. What about the two of you?"

Jin Yulu and Xiaode had already been working for several days and nights without rest. Both of them were exhausted to the extreme, but neither intended to return with Chen Changsheng to White Emperor City. Only by keeping watch on this black cliff could they remain at ease, and they certainly did not want to be absent if the White Emperor happened to wake up.

Xiaode reminded Chen Changsheng, "If you really can break the array, then before you break it, you must pay attention to your safety."

Jin Yulu added, "Logically, as long as the Empress is not crazy, she will not kill Your Holiness in front of the masses, but what we are doing has a high chance of forcing her into madness."

Chen Changsheng understood this reasoning. Madam Mu assuredly knew what Jin Yulu and Xiaode were doing in the Starfall Mountains. She did not care primarily because the situation in White Emperor City was rather chaotic, leaving it inconvenient for her to divide her strength. More importantly, she was absolutely sure that no one on this continent had the ability to break the seal on the black cliff. But if she suddenly discovered that someone could break this seal, what would she do?

.....

.....

The dripping of water could pass through stone, but this required

many years.

The South Stream Temple sword array could break the array imprisoning the White Emperor, and it probably would not need years, but it would require many days.

In the following days, Chen Changsheng resided in the Daoist Church of the Western Wastes. He would occasionally receive important demi-human representatives, but he spent most of the time resting.

Late in the night, Luoluo would help him enter the Imperial City, where he would use the secret passage to travel to the distant Starfall Mountains and use the South Stream Temple sword array to work on the seal.

No one besides figures like the Shi clan leader knew what he was doing. As a result, many people thought that in such a crucial moment, the Pope of the Human race, Chen Changsheng, was somewhat too quiet.

No one would treat this silence as weakness or surrender. The Human race was bound to demand an explanation for the deaths of Bie Yanghong and Wuqiong Bi, have the Demi-human race pay a price. In this moment, Chen Changsheng's silence placed a massive pressure on White Emperor City.

Chen Changsheng was also feeling a massive pressure, because Madam Mu had also been quiet.

His movements were secretive and difficult to discover, but he was confident that Madam Mu knew what he was doing.

Why had Madam Mu been so quiet these last few days? Why had she not reacted?

Just because she was confident that no one could break this array she had constructed using the strength of the seas?

But a great deal of the sealing array had already been wiped away by his South Stream Temple sword array.

Just what was Madam Mu thinking?

On a certain night, Chen Changsheng, dressed in a black robe, walked to the silent Imperial City with this question still on his mind.

In a stone hall deep within the Imperial City, Madam Mu opened her eyes. It was impossible to see what sort of question was on her mind, as her eyes were utterly devoid of emotion.

The firm stones paving the ground were still scarred by the battle from several days ago—cracks and shallow holes covered the floor. The walls of the city were also somewhat mottled, so old that they seemed to have been eroded by the storms from the Western Sea for tens of thousands of years.

Chen Changsheng pulled his gaze away from the city walls and into the depths of the Imperial City.

In this Imperial City, there were many eunuchs, maids, and Beast Guards loyal to Luoluo.

As the factions took shape, Luoluo gained more and more supporters, making it easier and easier for him to enter the Imperial City.

But he still did not believe that Luoluo's control over the Imperial City surpassed her mother's.

He knew that Madam Mu was somewhere within these dark halls, watching him.

It was the same feeling he had felt every other time he had entered the Imperial City over the last few days.

It was a cold gaze peering at him from the darkness, bereft of emotion. It was impossible to tell what she was truly thinking.

He had spent the last few days anticipating her sudden appearance in the darkness, but this scene had still not taken place.

He abruptly felt Madam Mu's gaze depart. What did this mean?

Was the recent silence and peace over the last few days about to come to an end?

Countless holes were suddenly punched in the darkness in front of the Imperial City.

It was countless helmets being raised, revealing the cold and bright eyes within.

Even the formless Qi of the world was disturbed, scattering the starlight falling from the night sky.

Several dozen demi-human experts walked out of the darkness and surrounded Chen Changsheng.

The attendants who were preparing to enter the palace with Chen Changsheng fled in terror.

The demi-human expert at the very front had a massive figure and exuded a terrifying pressure.

He was Xiang Qiu, the Xiang clan leader's youngest son and the strongest of this generation of the Xiang clan. He had spent his childhood deep in the mountains, cultivating the secret techniques of his clan. He rarely returned to White Emperor City, much less appeared before the common people. When he appeared, he was an immovable mountain.

Chen Changsheng stood in the shadow of this mountain, silent and calm.

Xiang Qiu towered over him, his voice cold. "For Your Holiness the Pope to dress in disguise and enter the palace at night, what is your purpose?"

Before Chen Changsheng could speak, a young voice brimming with majesty spoke for him.

"Do I need to report to anyone when I invite Teacher into the palace?"

Luoluo walked out from the Imperial City, accompanied by

several dozen eunuchs and palace maids, their footsteps resounding.

Soon after, even more footsteps came from behind, as well as the clomping of hooves. They gradually turned into a rain with faint booms of thunder.

More than one thousand elite demi-human soldiers rushed over from Heavensguard Pavilion like a tide. They pointed their forest of cold spears at those demi-human experts.

Xiang Qiu squinted at the Bear tribe leader standing at the front and asked, "You want to rebel?"

More and more footsteps and horse hooves could be heard in the darkness around the Imperial City as more and more demi-human soldiers gathered in this area.

It grew noisier and noisier in front of the Imperial City, but felt as if it was getting quieter and quieter.

Perhaps it was because the mood was getting increasingly tense, increasingly oppressive.

Deep within the Imperial City, no voice came out from the darkness.

Chapter 1006 – The Small White Flower Falling in the Hair, a Murderous Aura Gradually Spreading

Another, even more majestic, mountain appeared in front of the Imperial City.

It was the Xiang clan leader. He gazed apathetically at Chen Changsheng and declared, "It is already late. It is inconvenient even for Your Holiness to enter the palace."

He turned to Luoluo and said, "Your Highness must keep in mind the dignity of the White Emperor clan in your conduct."

Although these words were spoken indifferently, they had an incredible weight.

Luoluo looked at this elder that had spoiled her rotten as a child and suddenly found his face to be very unfamiliar.

Chen Changsheng knew of the Xiang clan leader's position in the Council of Elders and could clearly feel his unfathomable strength.

But his response was still calm, straightforward, unflinching.

Like a shallow stream, its surface like a mirror, so clear that one could see the bottom, but between the swimming fish was naught but hard stone.

He said, "I wish to use the passage in the Imperial City to visit His Majesty the White Emperor in the Starfall Mountains. Why do you want to stop me?"

The Xiang clan leader turned stern. Never had he imagined that Chen Changsheng would admit to his intentions.

And then he realized that there was no good answer.

In the tense situation, there was every reason to be suspicious of Chen Changsheng sneaking into the Imperial City at night, leaving

him with ample reason to object.

But now that Chen Changsheng had admitted his intentions, those reasons to object suddenly lost a great deal of their power.

Why had he not thought about this problem beforehand?

The Xiang clan leader stared into Chen Changsheng's spotlessly clear and calm eyes and suddenly thought, could it really be true that the simpler one's mindset is, the easier it is for one to be confused by fogs and mists?

But he still had to stop Chen Changsheng from entering the Imperial City.

"The entire continent knows that His Majesty is quietly cultivating and recovering from his injuries. He is currently at a vital bottleneck and cannot be disturbed. For Your Holiness to insist on meeting him, what are your intentions?"

"The alliance between the two races involves the well-being of the continent. His Majesty the White Emperor cherishes all living beings, so how can he care only about recuperating and cultivation, paying no mind to these matters?"

He looked at the Xiang clan leader and asked, "And just what are your intentions in preventing me from seeing His Majesty? Guilt, or fear?"

Although it was not explicitly stated, who could not understand the meaning contained in this question?

The wind blowing in front of the Imperial City felt like it had dropped several degrees.

Xiang Qiu angrily roared, "Cease, or end up covered in blood!"

Chen Changsheng looked at the Xiang clan leader and continued to ask, "Is this your meaning, or Madam Mu's meaning? Just what do all of you mean?"

He had completely ignored Xiang Qiu.

As he was the Pope, the only person in all of White Emperor City with the right to converse with him on equal terms was Madam Mu.

The Xiang clan leader was the patriarch of the greatest clan of the Demi-human race and was also the Chief Elder of the Council of Elders, so he barely made the grade.

Xiang Qiu was just the Xiang clan leader's son. No matter how strong he was, what right did he have for Chen Changsheng to respond to him?

To Chen Changsheng, this was not deliberate ignorance, but a very normal reaction. To Xiang Qiu, this was an enormous humiliation.

When he noticed the change in the situation, his complexion turned even nastier, his breathing heavier.

Those experts who had torn open the darkness with him and were prepared to engage in a history-making assault remained quiet and solemn.

But the cavalry leaders that had moved with them clearly thought differently.

Prior to Chen Changsheng's words, no one in the Demi-human race had ever been concerned about the White Emperor's safety, much less that he might have been caught in some terrifying conspiracy.

The position of White Emperor in the Demi-human race was too esteemed, comparable to a god.

No one could imagine him being caught in a trap.

Of course, Chen Changsheng's words were able to affect the situation partially due to his identity.

The effect of the Pope's words versus the words of an ordinary passerby was like the discrepancy between the heavens and the

earth.

More importantly, the story of the Cinnabar Pill had spread throughout the continent several months ago, the legend of the Pope using his blood to save the common herd.

Moreover, the events of the past had given the demi-humans an exceptionally good impression of Chen Changsheng, and they simply didn't believe that he could lie.

Chen Changsheng did not wait for the mood in front of the Imperial City to grow more complicated, nor did he wait for an answer to his question.

"No one can stop me from seeing His Majesty the White Emperor."

He stared into the Xiang clan leader's eyes and solemnly added, "Unless you kill me."

After saying this, he walked forward.

In the shroud of the night, the Imperial City was extremely quiet, his footsteps loud and clear.

Several thousand elite demi-human cavalry and many demi-human experts, either concealed in the darkness or already revealed, silently and nervously stood at the ready.

The same blood ran through their bodies, and now they felt the same cold sweat.

With Chen Changsheng's footsteps, the atmosphere in the Imperial City grew increasingly tense.

As Chen Changsheng got closer and closer, the Xiang clan leader's expression turned graver and graver.

As Chen Changsheng got farther and farther, Xiang Qiu's complexion grew darker and darker.

Chen Changsheng's words might have been able to stir doubt in the crowd, even change a few stances, but the pair were confident

that they could keep Chen Changsheng here.

They could even kill Chen Changsheng.

And they were certainly not afraid to kill Chen Changsheng.

Because the two of them were currently furious.

In their view, Chen Changsheng was too sinister. He was not like a Pope at all, but more like the legendary Demon Military Advisor Black Robe.

How could he use such a shameless lie to frame and slander them?

.....

.....

The Red River Beast Guards in front of the Imperial City silently yielded the path, parting like the tide.

As Chen Changsheng walked past the Xiang clan leader, he did not even pay him a glance.

Xiang Qiu groaned at this sight, blood trickling from his lips as he suffered an internal injury.

Even so, neither he nor his father attacked Chen Changsheng.

Because the darkness deep within the Imperial City had remained silent, no voice issuing from within.

Chen Changsheng entered the Imperial City, just like he had for several nights.

When he was still a young Daoist from Xining Village entering the capital for the first time, his gaze had been just as calm, his expression just as resolved.

And then, he saw Madam Mu.

Beneath a pear tree, in front of a stone hall.

It was not the season for pear trees to bloom, but since that pear

tree on the observation platform had been able to bloom several days ago, the pear tree could naturally bloom now as well.

A breeze blew past, though it was hard to tell if it was from the Starfall Mountains in the north or the great sea to the west.

Countless white flowers dropped from the branches, falling on the ground and on her body.

One little flower dropped straight onto her hair. It lightly shook in the wind, both beautiful and tinged with a hint of mourning.

Her white dress was very plain and seemed extremely solemn.

Her eyes were a glossy black. Reflecting the starlight, they appeared extremely serene, seeming to embody the secrets of the heavens, but also a desire to kill.

Her visage was one of apathy, but there was an extremely faint sorrow concealed within.

Had somebody died?

Was she mourning a relative?

Was it that Imperial Uncle of the Great Western Continent called Mu?

Or was it someone even closer to her?

Or was it himself in a little while?

Chen Changsheng thought of this question, but he had no desire to know the answer.

Chapter 1007 – Straight, Difficult

The pear tree in front of the dark hall and the pear blossoms falling on Madam Mu made Chen Changsheng recall the sight from a few days ago.

The pear tree on the observation platform had already been chopped by his sword into dust so fine that it couldn't be seen, so he had learned the story about the person in the painting from Luoluo.

He had been touched by Luoluo's deep affection, and he felt that Madam Mu had put incredible thought into making Luoluo accept the Demon Lord.

She probably deeply loved her only daughter, so why was she callous with regards to her marriage?

If his guess was right, why did she treat the White Emperor that she had loved for so many years so coldly?

Just what sort of person was she?

"The Xiang clan are just like massive, uninteresting mountains, as thick and cold as their bodies."

Madam Mu continued, "For Your Holiness the Pope to be able to ignore their existences and come to this place, your methods truly are extraordinary."

She was praising Chen Changsheng, but her gaze never touched his body. It remained fixed on the distant darkness.

It was probably the north.

"When I was very small, Teacher once used a phrase to praise my senior brother while also teaching me. This phrase was: 'A thousand words cannot compare to a single silence.'"

Chen Changsheng said, "From that moment, I began to speak much less, but I was still no match for Senior. I couldn't help

myself from talking sometimes. I wanted to speak to the fish in the stream, or speak to the books in the temple. Every time, I would always criticize myself, and even now, whenever I chat with Thirty-Six, I still get that sort of feeling."

Madam Mu noted, "His Majesty the Emperor has always been a mute."

"This was also how Senior comforted me."

Chen Changsheng paused for a while, then continued, "So later on, I changed one word in this phrase and began to follow it."

Madam Mu asked, "Which word?"

Chen Changsheng answered, "A thousand words cannot compare to a single straight."

Madam Mu slowly arched her brows. "Wang Po's 'straight'?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "Correct. I can't make myself conservative and maintain a steadfast Dao heart, so when I think too much, I'll talk too much, making it easy to make too many mistakes. This being the case, why not be more straightforward? As long as I believe that what I'm doing is reasonable, then I should do it."

Madam Mu said, "'This' has a right and wrong, and 'that' also has a right and wrong." (TN: This line comes from the second chapter of the 'Zhuangzi' in a section discussing the relativity of right and wrong from different perspectives, represented by 'this' and 'that'.)

Chen Changsheng answered, "But at least Wang Po and I believe that there is a right and wrong."

Madam Mu replied, "So you were able to come straight to the point tonight and come here to me?"

Chen Changsheng declared, "Forging straight forward with sword in hand will often let one arrive at one's goal faster."

Madam Mu ruefully sighed, "I have never encountered a single

obstruction on my path of cultivation, but I truly do tend to waver when doing something. Perhaps this is an innate deficiency of women?"

"Mother..."

Luoluo lightly called out, then hesitated.

Madam Mu's lips curled into a mocking smile. "The extroverted nature of woman is truthfully also a weakness."

Rather sad, Luoluo said no more.

"Your Holiness the Pope has spoken rightly. One truly should be more straightforward when doing things."

Madam Mu continued, "On the observation platform that day, I should have gone straight to killing you."

As she spoke, she still did not look at Chen Changsheng. Her eyes remained fixed on the distant darkness.

At the bottom of her eyes was an extremely faint fatigue and remorse.

Did she regret that she had not just killed Chen Changsheng on that day, or did she regret something else?

Just where was she looking now?

On this side of the sea, that side of the mountains, on the lake's opposite shore, there was a black cliff capped with ten thousand years of ice and snow.

Her gaze had always been fixed on that place, her regret deepening, her emotions dulling, her desire to kill rising.

A wind came from the Western Sea. Beneath the dome of the night sky, the countless snowy peaks remained unchanged, but the ice and snow accumulated over the centuries on the black cliff began to rustle down.

The wind tore at the ice, stirring it up and dashing it against the

surrounding trees and cliffs.

With a wave of his hand, Xiaode shattered a thick, falling tree into powder. He turned his head to look at White Emperor City, a tawny glow filling his eyes, making him seem extremely vicious. Jin Yulu stood behind, his eyes narrowed as he looked in the same direction, his gaze cold and razor-sharp.

They could feel the endless divine might contained within the sea breeze, but they would not retreat a single step, were prepared to fight with their lives on the line.

The White Emperor was in the black cliff behind them.

A point of weakness had been grinded out of the sealing array by Chen Changsheng's South Stream Temple sword array. With more time, they would be able to see the White Emperor. Even if their and Chen Changsheng's worst speculations were to come true, they would at least have proved Madam Mu's conspiracy.

Madam Mu could not possibly watch this happen.

She would undoubtedly put a stop to everything.

Xiaode and Jin Yulu had mentally prepared themselves for this.

In the last few days, while Chen Changsheng was sitting in front of the black cliff and contending against the sealing array, they had been keeping silent watch on the surroundings.

They were waiting for countless demi-human experts to rush forth in a wave, waiting for the demi-human army to cover the mountain like black snow.

They were waiting for Madam Mu to personally act.

Just like now.

Right after, the ice falling from the top of the cliff suddenly stopped and the wind ceased to howl. All became quiet.

It was like that wind from the Western Sea had never appeared, like it had always been chasing clouds over the sea.

Xiaode and Jin Yulu glanced at each other in confusion, but they did not relax their guard. On the contrary, they grew even more uneasy.

.....

.....

"Since you want to kill me, why did you change your mind?"

Chen Changsheng was unaware of what had happened in the Starfall Mountains, but he could sense the change in Madam Mu's aura.

More importantly, the Xiang clan leader and those demi-human experts outside the Imperial City illustrated that she really did want to kill him, even though the Xiang clan leader and those experts ultimately did not attack Chen Changsheng. Instead, they had silently watched him enter the Imperial City.

Madam Mu finally withdrew her gaze from that distant mountain.

She looked at Chen Changsheng and said, "Your Holiness, this question of yours sounds very much like an invitation."

Chen Changsheng replied, "If you can bear the consequences."

Madam Mu was quiet for a while, then asked, "Besides your teacher, who else is there that can bear it?"

Chen Changsheng answered, "But there are still many people that want to kill me. Perhaps it is because they have nothing to be concerned about."

"If there is nothing to be concerned about, there is naturally nothing to fear."

Madam Mu noted, "I don't like this place, and I never have, but between the heavens and earth, there are still some things that I am concerned about."

When she said this, she did not look at Luoluo, but below, toward

White Emperor City in the darkness.

But in reality, she might have been looking even farther.

The heavens and earth were vast, holding myriad things within. Though the Great Western Continent was far away, it was still within.

Luoluo lowered her head, her mood even more anguished.

"In truth, I had always been envious of Tianhai. Whether it was in cultivation or will, she had always been infinitesimally close to the shore of liberation on the other side. There were even times when her existence made me doubt those views I formed in my childhood."

She gazed at Chen Changsheng and said, "But in the end, she still died in your hands."

Chen Changsheng said nothing.

Madam Mu lastly said, "This matter taught me a lesson and also made me understand many things. Since we cultivate the Heavenly Dao and the Heavenly Dao itself is emotionless, then if we want to live long and finally gain the Great Dao, we must sever all emotions."

Chapter 1008 – A Conversation with the World, a Negotiation with Oneself

Silence.

The wind rustled the pear tree.

The answer had been made known.

Luoluo lowered her head even more.

Chen Changsheng said nothing for a very long time. Finally, he said, "If Empress is willing, I can act like none of this ever happened."

Madam Mu asked, "And what comes after the word 'willing'?"

Chen Changsheng stated, "Our two races are comrades-in-arms. We share a common enemy."

Madam Mu gave a forced smile. "You are speaking of that person?"

Chen Changsheng affirmed, "Correct. The Demon Lord should still be in White Emperor City, along with those two strangers."

He was issuing an invitation.

He was inviting Madam Mu to join him in killing someone.

He did not want to kill an ordinary person, but the sovereign of the continent's north, a mighty existence that was like darkness incarnate.

As for the two strangers from the distant continent, they were even more unfathomable existences.

Madam Mu was quiet for a while, then asked, "If I accept Your Holiness's invitation, what would happen next?"

Chen Changsheng answered, "Nothing."

Luoluo could not understand this conversation between her

teacher and her mother.

Madam Mu naturally understood.

Chen Changsheng's meaning was loud and clear. If she accepted this invitation, he would no longer pay any mind to that black cliff.

Whether the White Emperor could live or die, could escape from his jail, would no longer have anything to do with him.

A mocking smile appeared on Madam Mu's lips.

"You've finally matured."

She looked at Chen Changsheng and asked, "Are you not afraid of turning into the appearance you most loathed?"

Chen Changsheng recalled his conversations with Tang Thirty-Six by the lake and river, recalled those golden koi sinking into the mud. He was silent for a very long time, then said, "At certain important moments, one has to learn what to choose and what to give up."

Madam Mu commented, "I believe that this is the greatest sign of maturity, of decay."

Chen Changsheng sank into another period of silent thought.

He recalled those two who had just taken leave of this world, Bie Yanghong and Wuqiong Bi.

He thought of those ten-some rebellious princes entering the capital, the Tianhai Divine Empress standing on top of the Mausoleum of Books, and a sea of lotuses in front of the Divine Path, speckled with many red flowers.

"You're right. I shouldn't be thinking this way."

The moment he said these words, he felt his entire body lighten up. Even his sea of consciousness became much clearer.

Madam Mu arched her brows. She had not expected him to so quickly change his mind.

Just a moment ago, he had been pondering tactics and strategy, compromise and sacrifice, and now he was casting these all out of his mind.

In the view of many people, such fickle conduct was more appropriate for a child or a woman.

Chen Changsheng was not one of these.

He was just climbing an extremely steep and lonely mountain, and in his long and silent sojourn, he felt somewhat lonely and tired.

So he turned to take a glance at the world behind him.

"Then I will bid farewell here."

Chen Changsheng said to Madam Mu, "Empress is correct. These words should be said after I meet His Majesty the White Emperor."

With a slightly chilly expression, Madam Mu declared, "His Majesty will not see you."

Chen Changsheng pondered this, then asked, "Perhaps because it is already impossible for him to see me?"

Madam Mu looked at his eyes and asked, "If things really are as you think and he already is dead, what will you do?"

Luoluo raised her head at these words, her face even paler than the white blossoms dropping from the tree branches.

"The news that you are imprisoning a Black Frost Dragon will be spread as quickly as possible along the two shores of the Red River."

Chen Changsheng added, "I will then announce that you are colluding with the demons and have become an enemy of the Orthodoxy."

Madam Mu faintly smiled. "Do you think I will care about such things?"

Of Chen Changsheng's two statements, the former was to stir the flames of rage in the demi-human populace toward her while the latter was to light a flame for the entire continent.

But she was the Empress of the Demi-humans and a Saint. She had the confidence to disregard the wildfires that burned amidst the mountains, lakes, rivers, and pools.

Chen Changsheng said, "I don't know if you'll care, because even now, apparently nobody seems to know just what it is you care about."

The negotiations came to an end, but there was not much in the way of breakthroughs.

Because from start to finish, neither side had explicitly given their demands.

For a certain perspective, they had been negotiating with themselves.

This was not something very difficult to understand.

A conversation with the world was often a conversation with oneself.

Convincing the other party was far less important than convincing oneself.

Ultimately, Madam Mu withdrew her hand and Chen Changsheng withdrew his invitation, but it was not because they had convinced the other. They had simply convinced themselves.

.....

.....

Chen Changsheng traveled through the secret passage to the Starfall Mountains.

Everything had already been revealed to the starry sky, so Luoluo went with him.

The quiet Imperial City appeared even more quiet, even more empty. Madam Mu's figure appeared even more lonely and cold.

Mu Jiushi walked out from the hall. She stood beside her, her face fraught with concern.

Madam Mu faintly smiled at her. "Do you think me very pitiful?"

Mu Jiushi inadvertently nodded, then came to her senses and repeatedly shook her head.

The Tianhai Divine Empress was dead, and the Holy Maiden of the south had gone to the distant other continent, so in the present age, Madam Mu was the woman with the highest status in the world.

But in Mu Jiushi's eyes, she truly was very pitiful, because she was lonely.

"In order to become something, you must bear something. It's a very simple principle."

Madam Mu stroked Mu Jiushi's face and said, "Tomorrow, you will go back, because I do not want you to bear these things."

Mu Jiushi was stunned. Had things really gotten this bad? She stammered out, "Why don't you just act?"

In her view, now was the best chance to kill Chen Changsheng, and they could even use Xuelao City as a buffer.

If the Human race reacted and sent even more experts, what would they do then?

Madam Mu certainly knew that a quick sword could easily resolve a complex situation.

But Xuanyuan Po's appearance had disturbed the progress of the Heavenly Selection, and Chen Changsheng... had come too quickly, causing the entire situation to change. More importantly, even if that person's opinion had not completely changed, it must have been affected.

.....

.....

The dawn broke and countless swords flew through the air in return. In a stream of light, they retracted into the sheath, concealing their edges.

Chen Changsheng stood up and gazed at the black cliff before him. Exhaustion was evident on his face, but his eyes were still very bright.

Even when using the South Stream Temple sword array as a tool, breaking through this sealing array that was on par with the Tong Palace was still a very difficult task.

But everything was proceeding smoothly. After another span of time, they were bound to see the answer.

Jin Yulu was an elder who had participated in the northern expedition against the demons, so he had experienced all sorts of schemes, traps, and unimaginable emergencies. As a result, he was not delighted by this progress. On the contrary, he appeared even more serious.

He said to Chen Changsheng, "Last night, the Empress clearly had a desire to kill, but she ended up not attacking. You must find the reason."

Xiaode added, "The experts of the Xiang clan suddenly retreated and three armies that were making their way to White Emperor City suddenly stopped two hundred li out. There seems to have been some sort of strength on the two shores of the Red River that altered the decision of Madam Mu and the Council of Elders."

The change in last night's situation had benefited them, but they were still in a state of maximum vigilance.

The White Emperor had been imprisoned, and it was impossible to know whether he was alive or dead, so just where had that mysterious and formidable strength come from?

Very naturally, their gazes peered north, in the direction of the faraway Xuelao City.

When Chen Changsheng returned to White Emperor City, he received an invitation.

This invitation came from the large courtyard very close to the Xiang clan's estate.

But in reality, everyone knew that this invitation came from the north, from Xuelao City.

The Demon Lord had invited Chen Changsheng to a meeting.

Chen Changsheng considered the proposition, then accepted the invitation, setting the meeting to four days from now.

Four days quickly flew by.

Heavy snow fell over White Emperor City.

Chapter 1009 – A Thousand Years Later

On a certain day much later on, Demon Lord Nero watched as a blizzard of snow fell from the heavens and was swallowed up by the abyss behind the Demon Palace. He was suddenly reminded of that snowfall in White Emperor City.

Xuelao City was assailed year-round by snowstorms, and he had borne witness to countless, but none of them had left a deeper impression on him than that particular snowfall.

White Emperor City was located in the south, so its climate was gentle and warm. It was also near the Western Sea, so it rarely saw snow, but the snowfall on that day was incredibly heavy.

In just half a night, that city along the banks of the Red River was covered in snow, the yellow sands in the courtyard painted white.

The Demon Lord drew his gaze back from the abyss and said to Chen Changsheng, "I was wrong. On that day, I should have paid every price to kill you."

Nanke indifferently said, "I think so too."

Chen Changsheng was covered in blood, but his expression was very calm. "That's already a matter of the past."

.....

.....

In this snowstorm from far in the past, Chen Changsheng arrived at that courtyard near the Xiang clan's estate.

The Demon Lord truly had not intended to kill him, at least in the beginning.

Chen Changsheng opened the gate of the courtyard and entered, his shoes making a satisfying crunch as they stepped on the soft and fresh snow.

He wore a plain Daoist robe, though he had also added a large

cape to his attire.

The cold wind blowing against the mantle of snow quickly erased his footprints and also lifted up a corner of his cape.

Deep within the courtyard was a tree. A small clay stove had been placed under the tree, with a pot of tea boiling on it. Two seats had been placed around the stove.

The Demon Lord sat on the seat to the north.

The seat to the south was empty and waiting.

Chen Changsheng walked under the tree.

The pot of tea was just beginning to boil, letting out a pleasant whistle.

As pleasant as the Demon Lord's voice.

"A thousand years."

Chen Changsheng understood the meaning of the Demon Lord's words.

It could be presumed that anyone who knew of today's talk would feel a similar melancholy.

Exactly one thousand years ago, Emperor Taizong and the previous Demon Lord held a conversation in Luoyang.

It was an extremely famous conversation that no one in the continent did not know about. Even after a thousand years, it was still a topic reminisced on and sighed about by the populace.

Even after tens of thousands of years, this conversation would probably still occupy the most important chapter in the annals of history.

This conversation had decided the future of the entire continent.

The Human race would submit and pay tribute; the Demon race would have their wolf cavalry return to the north.

To the Human race, this conversation should have been the

greatest humiliation, but because Zhou Dufu had appeared amongst the willows, it took on a different meaning.

From this standpoint, this conversation was not only between Emperor Taizong and the previous Demon Lord. Rather, it was a discussion between three great individuals.

A thousand years later, the leader of the Human race and the Lord of the Demon race met once more, soon to partake in another conversation.

How could it not feel dizzying?

Chen Changsheng said, "Today, there are no bystanders to our conversation, so it might be very quickly lost in history."

The Demon Lord answered, "In the future, I will have a historian record our conversation today and even demand that every child be able to memorize it."

Chen Changsheng shook his head. "I will not do this, because I do not feel it will be very important."

These two statements took opposite positions but had very similar meanings.

Both the Demon Lord and Chen Changsheng had revealed an extremely formidable, almost frightening, self-confidence.

How one recorded it in the history books or if it was even recorded was the right of the victor.

.....

.....

With the conclusion of their opening remarks, the courtyard fell quiet for a long time.

The tea on the stove boiled, but the Demon Lord had no intention of pouring tea. He quietly stared at Chen Changsheng.

Chen Changsheng quietly stared at the Demon Lord.

This was not their first time meeting. More accurately, it was their third time.

But on their first meeting, he had not been able to clearly see the Demon Lord's face.

Just like the majority of the Demon Imperial clan, the Demon Lord had a very pale face, though it was not like jade or snow, but something rather strange.

Yet it was not a state of illness, instead seeming like a symbol that one was different from the world, a feeling that one was inhuman.

The Demon Lord suddenly smiled.

He had a rather unique way of smiling, revealing more of his gums. When contrasted against his pale complexion, there was nothing too ugly about it, though it gave off a rather cruel and sanguine aura.

"You really are an interesting person."

The Demon Lord said, "Or maybe you aren't a person, because your body does not give off the smell of a human. It's more like... a tool?"

Chen Changsheng recalled that the Demon Lord might have had some idea about his background, or perhaps knew even more about it.

But it did not matter.

Whether he was a tool or a fruit, he knew who he was, so that was enough. This comment naturally would not disturb his Dao heart.

Seeing no reaction, the Demon Lord gradually drew back his smile, indifferently saying, "I came to White Emperor City this time primarily to do three things."

Given his prudent way of doing things, those three things were assuredly matters of utmost importance. Chen Changsheng

thought and thought, but he could only think of one matter.

The Demon Lord naturally would not discuss what he had encountered during the baptism of the Wildfire in the Celestial Tree. He said, "At this point, I have finished one and a half, and now we come to today."

Chen Changsheng asked, "It has to do with me?"

The Demon Lord replied, "Of course, because the most important matter was meeting you."

Chen Changsheng asked, "When you left Xuelao City, you were already sure that you would meet me here?"

The Demon Lord answered, "I was prepared to marry Princess Luoluo and the Demi-human race was prepared to ally with me. You would definitely come, and so we would definitely meet."

Chen Changsheng asked, "Why must you meet with me?"

The Demon Lord explained, "I thought that if I didn't kill you, I would like to ask you a question."

Chen Changsheng inquired, "What question?"

The Demon Lord asked, "What is our purpose in living?"

Chen Changsheng fell silent.

Several days ago, after Bie Yanghong left this world, he had sat in the courtyard and gazed up at the innumerable stars, sensing that black void like the mouth of a well, pondering this question.

In truth, in the many nights after the coup of the Mausoleum of Books, he had pondered this question.

In the view of the common people, questions like this were too abstruse. They had a tart taste and smelled of books, were liable to make others laugh.

But this was truly a question worth contemplating.

People like him and the Demon Lord naturally understood this

principle.

"In different positions, one must do different things, consider different questions."

The Demon Lord apathetically said, "We are the highest existences in this world, so we must see the farthest."

Chen Changsheng quietly pondered this statement, then asked, "Where does your gaze lie?"

The Demon Lord answered, "Above the sea of stars."

Chen Changsheng understood his meaning.

The Demon Lord added, "And also a thousand autumns, ten thousand generations."

A normal person would have found these responses incomprehensible, but the Demon Lord knew that Chen Changsheng would understand.

Chen Changsheng really did understand, because he thought the same, because he was the Pope of the Human race.

The Demon Lord continued, "This is duty, and also pressure. But it is also the greatest source of pleasure, the firmest meaning to exist."

"Just what is above the sea of stars? The other race of the Sacred Light Continent?"

Chen Changsheng calmly gazed into the Demon Lord's eyes and asked, "Just what is your relationship with them? What are the stealers of fire?"

Chapter 1010 – I Just Don't Want to Make That Judgment

The Demon Lord calmly gazed at Chen Changsheng, his stare dragging on and on, until suddenly, he smiled.

The gums revealed by his smile and his pale face made Chen Changsheng recall the phrase 'white snow, red blood'.

In the end, the Demon Lord gave no explanation, only saying, "All you need to know is that I was born on this continent, grew up on this continent."

Chen Changsheng thought of that sentence in Wang Zhice's notebook.

Position is relative.

The Demon Lord's meaning was crystal-clear. Since he was born on this side, he was not part of that side.

This sounded like nonsense, but it was actually the most important declaration of his stance.

Chen Changsheng saw endless ambition and almost divine cruelty in the Demon Lord's eyes, saw serenity and indifference, but he did not see deception.

He was quiet for a while, then said, "I have a few thoughts with regards to the Sacred Light Continent."

A hint of admiration flashed in the depths of the Demon Lord's eyes, but it quickly turned into ice.

He understood what Chen Changsheng meant, and he also had his thoughts on this matter.

It was precisely for this reason that he was even warier of Chen Changsheng.

Whether it was Shang Xingzhou or the White Emperor couple,

Black Robe or the Demon Commander, the Demon Lord had never cared too much about them, no matter how foresighted or invincible they were.

He was still young, still had enough time to mature. Moreover, it was precisely because he was young that he had a few special characteristics that many old people had already lost.

But now, he was facing the similarly young Chen Changsheng, and he had also seen those special characteristics in him, which made him feel slightly uneasy.

But it was still not the moment of life and death, because this conversation had not concluded. It might have even only just begun.

If Chen Changsheng was still unable to give an answer that satisfied him by the end, he would reconsider.

"Did you ever think about working with me on a few things?"

The Demon Lord had used a casual tone to bring up the truly important question today.

Chen Changsheng did not think for too long before giving an answer. "The hatred between the two sides is too deep. No one has the right to negotiate peace, not even to consider your proposition."

The Demon Lord shook his head. "A person like Tang Second naturally doesn't have the right, because people like him are subjects. Having such thoughts will lead to disloyalty, but we are different. We are sovereigns, the guides who will lead our people forward. We have the right to choose the path."

As he watched snowflakes instantly melt as they touched the tea pot, Chen Changsheng recalled that conversation from not too long ago at Wenshui City, in the Tang clan's old estate.

The snowfall that day was also rather heavy and the topics discussed were rather similar. It had not been particularly quiet,

but the cold had pierced into their bones.

Just what should the future continent look like? Just what should be the relationship between the three races? These questions had been pondered by countless sages and Saints.

Although it was rather difficult to say the answer, there was no need to explicitly state it. Everyone knew that it should be peace.

But in the Tang clan's old estate, the Tang Old Master had said a few words that indicated that such a thing was impossible for now.

It was impossible even if one looked several centuries out.

Chen Changsheng recalled the siege of Luoyang and said, "Demons eat humans."

The Demon Lord looked into his eyes and responded, "I don't."

Chen Changsheng said, "Hatred can't disappear just like this. Your people will also not forget what happened on the northern expedition just because I never massacred your tribes."

The Demon Lord argued, "The demi-humans could forget their past hatreds, so why can't the humans? In the end, it's just a question of time."

Chen Changsheng said, "Perhaps after many years, the Human race might be able to forget the hatred from back then, but it's very difficult now. I myself cannot do it."

The Demon Lord arched his brow. "You never experienced my race invading the south. You live in the most glorious generation of the Human race. I do not understand where your hatred comes from."

"I've read many books, and the books record the stories from that era. One of these stories has left the deepest impression on me."

Chen Changsheng remembered the histories of the previous dynasty he had read in the Orthodox Academy's library, falling quiet for a while before continuing, "Back then, the demons began

their southward invasion, their momentum like a fire. The humans just happened to be in the middle of a civil war and were powerless to resist. Divine General Li Xun of the previous dynasty led three thousand elite cavalry to Snowhold Pass. Isolated and without help, they still managed to staunchly defend for one year until Chen Xuanba appeared."

The Demon Lord slowly narrowed his eyes, a cold glint flashing in them.

No one on the continent did not know of this famous defense, and it had generated a massive controversy in its aftermath that was even now being debated. Even the rhetoricians of Xuelao City would often bring up this matter for discussion. Just what did Chen Changsheng intend by bringing up this matter?

"It was not a staunch defense, but a defense to the death..."

Chen Changsheng took the tea pot from the stove and poured himself a cup.

And then he stared into the melting snowflakes in the cup for a long time.

Back then, cold snow like this might have fallen over Snowhold Pass every day. Did those soldiers and ordinary people have a cup of hot tea to drink?

Naturally not, because they did not even have rations and the trees had been shorn bare of their bark. It was even more desperate than the siege of Luoyang.

When Chen Xuanba led the cavalry to drive back the Demon race's wolf cavalry and entered Snowhold Pass, he saw hell on earth.

Of the three thousand elite cavalry, one thousand four hundred remained, but many of the common people in the city, the women and the children, had died, and it was said that many had been eaten.

And the one who had executed his concubine with one slash of his sword and distributed the meat to the soldiers was that man always famed for his compassion, Li Xun.

This matter had ignited such a massive controversy that it was still being debated, even after a thousand years.

Those people from back then probably did not know even now if they were right or wrong, right?

Snowhold Pass had to be held, or else the wolf cavalry could rush through and menace the heartland of the Human race.

Tianliang County would have no time to rest and the Human race would never be able to last until things turned for the better.

But was this right?

Even the scholar with the most venomous hatred for the demons, even Chen Xuanba, who was Li Xun's most ardent admirer, remained silent on this question.

But most of the participants no longer needed to know the answer.

When the siege of Snowhold Pass was relieved, Li Xun committed suicide on the spot, while the thousand-plus remaining soldiers, from the deputy general to the lowest soldier, eventually died on the battlefield.

Chen Changsheng said to the Demon Lord, "I do not know how I should judge them. Demons eat humans, and those humans also ate humans, and these were their compatriots. But if they did not guard Snowhold Pass? Many more humans would have been eaten by your race."

The Demon Lord asked, "So you have such a deep hatred of my Divine race?"

"I didn't speak clearly just now. This is not hatred."

Chen Changsheng thought for a few moments, then said, "I just

want to strive for a time where such a tragedy will never again happen to the Human race, where there will no longer be a need to pass judgment on such things."

The meaning of this statement was exceptionally clear.

If such an unjudgeable tragedy had to take place in the future, he hoped that it would only happen in the Demon race, not the Human race.

Chapter 1011 – The Courtyard Surrounded in the Snow

Chen Changsheng was not Shang Xingzhou. He did not have the lofty ambition or the will to completely exterminate the demons, but he had his own thoughts.

He hoped for the demons to be rendered extremely weak so that for the foreseeable future, they would not dare to have any designs against the Human race.

The Demon Lord's expression was very calm, with no detectable rage. "And then our races will begin trading, the two Imperial clans might even intermarry, and your race will suppress the Divine race's language and tongue, leaving only those paintings and sculptures? What a coincidence—this is my plan as well."

Chen Changsheng said nothing, only gazed at the gradually freezing tea in his cup.

There had never been anything new beneath the starry sky.

This conversation, this negotiation, had no chance of continuing.

The Demon Lord asked, "What I don't understand, since your stance is so firm, is why you came to meet me."

Chen Changsheng replied, "Because I wanted to know why you wanted to meet me."

The Demon Lord looked into his eyes. "Even if you're not willing to talk peace, we can still work together."

If they could not talk of peace but could still work together, their target was naturally a third party.

This was what had confused Chen Changsheng the most before coming.

In the current circumstances, the Demi-human race had already

decided to ally with Xuelao City, and their target was naturally the Human race.

What did the Demon Lord mean here by working together? Did he think that Madam Mu could no longer control the situation? That the demi-humans would still end up continuing their alliance with the humans?

If that was true, what reason did Chen Changsheng have to work together with him?

"The situation has changed."

The Demon Lord raised his head to look up at the heavy snow falling from the sky. "On that night four days ago, the entire smell of White Emperor City changed."

Chen Changsheng knew what he was referring to. "I do not need to feel uneasy."

The Demon Lord shook his head. "I do not know what the White Emperor is thinking, and neither do you."

Chen Changsheng noticed that he spoke of the White Emperor, not Madam Mu.

The Demon Lord said, "I've always suspected that the White Emperor is pretending to be asleep."

After a moment of silence, Chen Changsheng said, "Or perhaps something really did happen."

The Demon Lord joked, "Do you have such a pessimistic view of everything?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "This is my optimistic view."

The two understood what each other meant.

The Demon Lord replied, "You are too naive. Anyone who underestimates a White Emperor will be punished, and this includes my mighty father."

Chen Changsheng asked, "If the White Emperor was not imprisoned while heavily injured, why is he hiding from the world?"

The Demon Lord explained, "It's obvious. He's sitting on the mountain while watching the tigers fight... Don't forget, he's always been the world's most tyrannical tiger, cruel and shrewd."

Chen Changsheng noted, "You seem to be afraid of him."

"Old people are all very scary, and they smell of rot."

A disgusted look appeared on the Demon Lord's face, as if he really had smelled something nasty.

Chen Changsheng asked, "What does this have to do with me?"

The Demon Lord looked into his eyes and said, "Both of us are carrying a heavy shell, crawling forward, step by step. It's very tiring."

Chen Changsheng said nothing.

The Demon Lord's gaze turned more profound. "Let's help each other remove these heavy shells. How about it?"

Chen Changsheng calmly looked back. "You want me to murder my teacher?"

"So what? I was even able to kill my father, and besides, that teacher of yours has always been a madman."

A strange look appeared on the Demon Lord's face as he said, "I just don't understand; why has he always found you so disagreeable to the eye?"

Chen Changsheng did not explain. This was a problem between him and Shang Xingzhou, and it was inappropriate to speak of it to outsiders.

"You alone are not enough to kill Shang Xingzhou."

The Demon Lord proposed, "I can help you, and once all those old

codgers are dead, and we fight again, won't it be much more pleasant?"

Chen Changsheng said, "The demons stand to gain the most from a fight between me and my teacher."

The Demon Lord answered, "I understand what you mean, so before that, I will express my sincerity."

Upon hearing these words, Chen Changsheng was shocked speechless. He had not even thought in that direction.

In the snowy demon lands of the north, who else could have the same importance as Shang Xingzhou?

Chen Changsheng had never expected that the Demon Lord was prepared to come to blows with his most accomplished minister, his fellow conspirator, his own teacher!

Since he had not expected it, he naturally found it hard to believe, and these emotions manifested in his eyes.

The Demon Lord knew that it would truly be difficult to convince Chen Changsheng, but he could not give the reason.

"If you agree, I naturally won't attempt to snatch Xu Yourong or your female student. I can even give my younger sister to you."

The Demon Lord faintly smiled. "In any case, she's been by your side the entire time."

Chen Changsheng still found it impossible to understand. "Just what are you thinking?"

The Demon Lord said, "I've already said what I wanted to say. If you make a decision in the future, you might as well write me a letter."

Chen Changsheng asked, "A letter?"

The Demon Lord said, "Grand Scholar Tungus and that generation's Pope often exchanged letters. We can follow their example."

Chen Changsheng thought this proposition over, then said, "If we can both leave White Emperor City alive, I will write you a letter."

Yes, surviving was the prerequisite for everything.

Disregarding the numerous dangers hidden within White Emperor City, they were both the greatest threat to each other.

No matter how much their conversation had talked of peace, working together, help, and even friendship.

If there was a chance, they would choose without hesitation to kill the other.

Like in the moment this conversation came to an end.

Snow incessantly fell.

The only tree in the courtyard had already become white.

The only color came from the small clay stove.

Because the stove and pot were hot, and for some reason, the water in the pot never boiled dry.

Chen Changsheng and the Demon Lord no longer spoke. They quietly sat for a long time, gradually turning into two snowmen.

.....

.....

Countless snowmen were outside the courtyard.

The farthest were the leaders of various demi-human tribes and a few valiant and powerful experts.

On the road running by the stone wall stood several hundred Xiang clan suicide soldiers. Led by Xiang Qiu, they warily kept watch in front of them.

The Xiang clan leader stood at the very front, a massive snow-capped mountain.

But he was not the person closest to the courtyard.

Closest to the courtyard were five carriages. The Archbishop of the Western Wastes and his priests stood behind the carriages, all of them extremely respectful.

Besides the five carriages, there was also a group of people standing in the snow.

They were government laborers, a girl who bought cosmetics, fortune-tellers, elders who sold sesame seed candy, and a blind zither player.

The Xiang clan leader stared at the blind zither player, his expression incredibly grave.

As one of the strongest demi-human experts, only half a step from the Divine, why could he not see through this blind zither player?

And just what sort of people were inside those five carriages?

Chapter 1012 – The Orthodoxy's Staff Holder

Snow had fallen over White Emperor City for half a night and an entire day, rendering all its streets white. The people standing outside the courtyard were motionless, so they had become snowmen ages ago, with the occasional puff of hot air coming from their snow-covered mouths and noses. It was a rather strange sight.

Countless gazes watched the courtyard, wanting to know what the Demon Lord and Chen Changsheng were discussing. If the talks did not go well, when should they strike?

Luoluo stood by the window, calmly observing the snow. She did not know what was being discussed in the courtyard, but she knew that her teacher would not promise anything.

Madam Mu was also gazing through the snow at the courtyard. She felt the same as Luoluo, so she was waiting to see who struck first.

The courtyard's gate was tightly shut, and the only sound coming from within was the patter of snowflakes against the stone walls.

The yellow sands covered in a mantle of snow had seemingly become the plain of snow outside Xuelao City.

The massed snow on the branches of the sole tree appeared like countless white pillars.

Chen Changsheng and the Demon Lord quietly sat in the snow.

A moment ago, they had still been engaged in a candid conversation, speaking of working together and possible friendship, even saying that if they both could leave White Emperor City alive, they should exchange letters.

A moment later, the situation had become extremely dangerous, as if one side or the other could attack at any moment, using their most powerful moves to end the other party's life.

This shift had been extremely sudden, so sudden that anyone besides the participants would have found it absolutely absurd, though this did not matter, as there were no spectators.

Chen Changsheng and the Demon Lord did not find this shift absurd, because from the beginning to now, from the observation platform to here, they had always wanted to kill each other.

Whether it was a negotiation or a conversation, they were just trifling matters compared to killing the other.

And they were both capable of killing each other.

On the observation platform, Chen Changsheng had used the South Stream Temple sword array to break the Demon Lord's technique, and he had not stopped merely because Madam Mu had summoned all the clouds in the city to stop him, but also because he had sensed danger. The Demon Lord was most likely concealing some killing blow in his sleeve, though he did not know exactly what it was.

The Demon Lord had a deeper understanding of Chen Changsheng's cultivation level and methods, but he also was not confident, especially after those five carriages arrived outside the courtyard.

He looked into Chen Changsheng's eyes and asked, "Shang Xingzhou can't come and Wang Po can't come, so who came today?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "This being the case, Black Robe and the Demon Commander also won't be able to make it. Even if the Eight Great Mountain Men are still alive, they probably also won't be able to come."

They had already discussed this question on the observation platform.

That they had brought it up again was a sign that they had both decided to give up. They were somewhat reluctant, so they wanted

to confirm things one last time.

After this exchange, Chen Changsheng and the Demon Lord once more fell into a long silence, then they simultaneously sighed.

These two sighs symbolized resignation and were chock-full of regret.

The snowstorm today was massive, the opportunity too superb.

The Demon Lord was far from Xuelao City, the Pope in a strange land. These circumstances were too rare and would probably be very difficult to reproduce.

They could not kill the other, so how could they not feel disappointed?

"After careful consideration, there's not a lot of benefit for me if I kill you. The Human race will be even more united and also furious."

The Demon Lord ruefully sighed, "From this perspective, there's really not much meaning to your existence."

Chen Changsheng's lips perked into a smile as fresh as the spring breeze. "I've gotten used to it."

From the moment he was born, his existence was a trap, a trap targeted at the Tianhai Divine Empress.

His existence had never had any sort of meaning to himself. In other words, he should have never appeared in this world.

But he was currently searching, and could even be said to have found it.

The Demon Lord slightly tilted his head. He could see that there was nothing forced about this smile, so he arched his brows and said, "You really are a monster."

Chen Changsheng had received many evaluations, and most of them had been positive: fresh, clean, persistent, genius.

Even his enemies would at most say that he was somewhat wooden or too stubborn, or else they might criticize him for the unwise way in which he handled his relationship with Shang Xingzhou.

But this was his first time being called a monster.

Chen Changsheng was not angry. On the contrary, he found the Demon Lord's view very interesting, and even somewhat close to what he himself thought was true.

There was a banal saying that went, 'The person that understands you the most is not your friend, but your enemy.'

Then the Demon Lord might be his true enemy.

As he thought about these things, he took the cup of tea that was on the verge of freezing and dumped it on the snow in front of him.

This was an offering to those people that had died to the demon wolf cavalry.

He was a guest, so he should be the one to bid farewell.

He stood up, brushed the snow off his body, nodded at the Demon Lord, then began to make his way out of the courtyard.

As he watched him leave, the Demon Lord suddenly said, "The White Emperor will definitely be very disappointed."

Chen Changsheng stopped and asked, "Why is it not Madam Mu?"

The Demon Lord explained, "Since you're not willing to work with me, Madam Mu will be my firmest supporter."

Chen Changsheng was quiet for a while, then asked, "Just what does Madam Mu want to do?"

"The Great Western Continent has always been traditional and boastful, and she has the blood of the Elves running through her. Do you think she would like humans?"

The Demon Lord sighed, "And besides, she's an Aquarius, so nobody knows what she's thinking."

Chen Changsheng knew that the Demon Lord was referring to the constellations popular in Xuelao City, but he had no idea what it meant to be born under the Aquarius constellation.

He shook his head in confusion and continued walking.

The Demon Lord's hands slowly stroked those two cold statues in his hand as an annoyed expression appeared on his face.

He turned his gaze to that trail of footsteps on the snow, so straight that they seemed to be following a ruler, and muttered to himself, "He actually moved over the entire Li Palace. He's really afraid of death."

.....

.....

With a creak and a shower of snowflakes, Chen Changsheng opened the gate and walked out.

This sound and sight was quickly spread to all of White Emperor City.

The majority of people felt relieved, though a few felt disappointed, shocked, suspicious, and all types of emotions.

People began to descend from the five carriages.

Daoist Siyuan of the Hall of Subjugation.

Archbishop An Lin of the Divine Edict.

Master Linghai Zhiwang of the Hall of Heavenly Judgment.

The newly-appointed Archbishop Hu Thirty-Two of the Hall of Announcements.

Mao Qiuyu had remained to guard the Li Palace, but the remaining four of the Five Prefects of the Orthodoxy had rushed across tens of thousands of li to White Emperor City, their

respective precious treasures in hand.

Chen Changsheng first gave a deferential bow to the blind zither player, then spoke with Linghai Zhiwang and the other Prefects.

A blue curtain stirred, shaking off the snow, and a graceful and handsome young master descended from the last carriage. Tang Thirty-Six had arrived.

In his right hand was a seemingly unremarkable short staff.

Just when Chen Changsheng was prepared to say something, Tang Thirty-Six threw over the short staff.

At this sight, Linghai Zhiwang turned extremely gloomy while An Lin couldn't help but lightly sigh.

The unremarkable short staff was the Orthodoxy's Divine Staff.

If Chen Changsheng had not reacted quickly, it might have fallen into the snow. What if it had been broken?

Tang Thirty-Six pretended not to see the looks on the faces of the Prefects as he angrily said, "In the future, stop having me do things like this."

In order to break the seal over the Red River, the Orthodoxy's Divine Staff had emptied itself of light. It had spent the last few days in the Daoist Church of the Western Wastes, receiving sustenance.

Today, Chen Changsheng was meeting the Demon Lord, so he had needed to fully prepare himself. He needed someone he could trust and also had the right to hold the staff, so it could only be Tang Thirty-Six.

Even if Linghai Zhiwang and the other Prefects found Tang Thirty-Six unpleasant, they could not deny this.

Because Tang Thirty-Six had filled this role before.

Back then, the person to receive the Divine Staff from the Pope had not been Chen Changsheng, but him.

Chapter 1013 – The Will of the Li Palace

In the battle on the Bridge of Helplessness, Chen Changsheng had defeated Xu Yourong, confirming his status as successor of the Orthodoxy.

But on that night, he had not gone to the Great Hall of Light, electing instead to eat stewed beef ribs with Xu Yourong on Fortune Peace Road.

The one to face countless shocked gazes and raise his hand to ask for leave for him had been Tang Thirty-Six.

The person who had lowered their head and received for him the Divine Staff that symbolized the Orthodoxy's authority was also Tang Thirty-Six.

Today, the person holding the Divine Staff to maintain the Li Palace's array and lock it on the person in that courtyard of snow was still Tang Thirty-Six.

This sort of pressure was truly too great. Even someone like Tang Thirty-Six was not willing to do it again.

Chen Changsheng looked at him and smiled, and then he turned his head back to the snowbound courtyard, his smile gradually fading.

Inviting the Prefects to White Emperor City was tantamount to moving the Li Palace's array here.

If the Demon Lord had attacked just now, he really did want to try and see if he could kill him.

Regrettably, but also perhaps fortunately, the Demon Lord had not moved.

Then based on the current situation, Madam Mu would no longer give them a chance like today's.

He and the Demon Lord might both be able to leave White

Emperor City safely, then...

"There's a matter that I'm wondering if you can help me with."

He was speaking to Tang Thirty-Six.

Surprised, Tang Thirty-Six asked, "What matter?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "Help me write a few letters."

Tang Thirty-Six was puzzled about why Chen Changsheng wanted help writing letters. A possibility immediately came to mind, causing his face to instantly turn lively. "A love letter? Although your literary talents are far inferior to mine, why learn from foolish youths? Are you planning to write letters to Luoluo and are afraid that the Holy Maiden will see them?"

Chen Changsheng wanted to explain, but he ultimately just shook his head, appearing extremely helpless.

.....

.....

Tang Thirty-Six had only arrived at White Emperor City early this morning.

Because he had come in too much of a hurry with such a strict deadline, he did not bring too many subordinates from the Tang clan, only Fivekind Man.

The Fivekind Man that had appeared in Wenshui City several days ago.

In the conflict between Shang Xingzhou and Chen Changsheng, the Tang Old Master preferred the former, but in this major event involving the demons, his response was incredibly clear. He would provide anything that Chen Changsheng required.

The people from the Orthodoxy had also just arrived this morning.

Chen Changsheng had known of this matter the entire time,

which is why he had scheduled his meeting with the Demon Lord for today.

The Tang Old Master had dispatched his strongest, as had the Li Palace. Their momentum could be described as vast and mighty.

The moment Hu Thirty-Two arrived with Chen Changsheng's decree, he and Daoist Siyuan left the same night from the Li Palace. On the way, they met up with Linghai Zhiwang and An Lin. Together with seven thousand Orthodoxy cavalry, they traveled due west from the Mount Song Army headquarters. After passing through the Cong Province Army headquarters, they were guided by the Bear tribe and stealthily entered the watershed of the Red River.

The seven thousand cavalry were currently ensconced deep in the mountains on the opposite shore. Although they could not affect the overall situation in the land of the demi-humans, they still brought an intimidating aura. As for the four archbishops and the Li Palace treasures they carried, they were a powerful force that no one could underestimate.

Of the Six Prefects of the Orthodoxy, Mu Jiushi had been exiled, Daoist Baishi had been executed, and Hu Thirty-Two had been added, leaving five.

Now, four of them had left the capital, coming to White Emperor City tens of thousands of li away.

Mao Qiuyu had not come. Many people thought that this Orthodoxy Prefect with the highest cultivation level had not appeared because he was holding down the Li Palace, but Chen Changsheng knew that this was not the case. Mao Qiuyu was currently in seclusion, waiting for the enlightenment which would let him break through into the Divine.

The matter of White Emperor City was naturally of extreme importance and the safety of the Pope was of the highest priority, but in Chen Changsheng's view, it was also an extremely

important matter for Mao Qiuyu, at this most crucial of moments, to remain undisturbed by outside forces and successfully enter the Divine Domain.

He looked at Linghai Zhiwang and asked, "Who is standing guard over Principal Mao?"

"The Heavenly Dao Academy is temporarily being managed by Daoist Shuxin. Zhuang Zhihuan has remained in the Li Palace this entire time."

Linghai Zhiwang added, "Besides this, the Archbishop of the Temple Seminary and several senior sisters from the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green have also been attending on the side."

Zhuang Zhihuan had been born in poverty, but he had always been close to the Wenshui Tangs, as they had financially subsidized his education. After acting as Mao Qiuyu's deputy for many years, he had finally become Principal of the Heavenly Dao Academy several years ago. In terms of both cultivation level and insight, he was incredibly accomplished.

With him standing guard over Mao Qiuyu and those equally capable personages from the rest of the Six Ivies, there was no reason for Chen Changsheng to worry. But when he thought about Zhuang Zhihuan's son, he couldn't but show a rather strange expression.

Everyone present knew of the story of the Garden of Zhou and the tragic suicide of Zhuang Huanyu by the well, so they understood Chen Changsheng's concern.

Linghai Zhiwang glanced at Daoist Siyuan. Daoist Siyuan pretended not to see.

An Lin felt helpless. She stepped forward and said to Chen Changsheng, "Before we left, the venerable Daoist issued a decree ordering the Prince of Xiang to take charge of this matter."

Chen Changsheng was at first surprised, and then he came to his

senses and ceased discussion on the topic.

It was clear that his teacher would not do anything in the current situation, so his ordering the Prince of Xiang to take charge of this matter was probably meant to put Chen Changsheng at ease.

Linghai Zhiwang and Daoist Siyuan seemed to think differently.

"What's wrong?" Chen Changsheng asked.

Daoist Siyuan said, "Before Priest Xin went to Fengyang City, he met a Daoist from the Monastery of Eternal Spring."

Chen Changsheng fell silent.

Priest Xin had gone to Fengyang City and died there.

It had been for the explicit purpose of making Bie Yanghong and Wuqiong Bi believe that Chen Changsheng had killed their son.

Master, do you really want me to die so badly?

Chen Changsheng had lost count of the number of times he had thought of this question after the coup of the Mausoleum of Books.

Although the situation had changed, although both the Imperial Court and Shang Xingzhou hoped for him to do a few things in White Emperor City...

Who knew how deep this obsession was?

With a gloomy expression, Linghai Zhiwang said, "If someone were to make a stab at your back in this crucial moment, it would be very difficult to handle."

The Orthodoxy had unfathomably deep reserves and hidden strength, so even Chen Changsheng's bringing the Li Palace to White Emperor City did not matter too much, but if Shang Xingzhou did not want to see the Orthodoxy gain an expert of the Divine Domain, who could really stop him?

Chen Changsheng indicated that there would be no more discussion of this matter.

Linghai Zhiwang and Daoist Siyuan were astonished, but they said no more.

Traveling over vast distances and enduring the pressure of the snowstorm outside the courtyard left the Orthodoxy's people and Tang Thirty-Six thoroughly fatigued, but they still could not rest. Chen Changsheng required their opinion on several matters.

The Daoist church became very quiet.

Starting from the coup of the Mausoleum of Books, a human expert of the Divine Domain returning to the sea of stars became a very commonplace event, but those had been a result of the Human race's internal conflicts. In contrast, Bie Yanghong and Wuqiong Bi had died at the hands of another race.

Linghai Zhiwang declared, "Madam Mu must die."

Even a Prefect of the Orthodoxy did not have the right to speak of a Saint's death. In normal times, this could be considered a rash and presumptuous statement.

But everyone very calmly accepted his words.

In their view, this was only to be expected.

Chapter 1014 – There Has Never Been Only One Truth

Daoist Siyuan and An Lin said nothing, but it was clear that they supported Linghai Zhiwang.

Hu Thirty-Two sighed and said, "It won't be easy... but she still has to be killed."

Tang Thirty-Six looked at Chen Changsheng.

He had no opinion on this matter, so he looked to see what Chen Changsheng thought.

Chen Changsheng silently thought for a while, then nodded.

The matter was settled.

With just the people in this Daoist church, it might currently be impossible to kill Madam Mu, but Madam Mu had to die, and her death would come one day.

Because this was the will of the Li Palace and also the will of the Human race.

Chen Changsheng had once said to Luoluo that for the deaths of Bie Yanghong and Wuqiong Bi, the Demi-human race would have to pay a sufficient price.

Though he had not stated what this price was, Luoluo well understood that it was Madam Mu's death.

No one was willing to die, and certainly not a Saint, even if the Aquarius constellation the Demon Lord said she was born under meant her mental world was different from the masses.

So Chen Changsheng did not understand why, on that night four days ago, Madam Mu had suddenly drawn back her hand from killing him.

That strength that had run through the streets of White Emperor

City, intimidating countless tribes along the shores of the Red River—if it did not come from Xuelao City, where did it come from?

Chen Changsheng gazed up at the dark skies outside the church, a pensive look on his face.

The snow had already stopped and no clouds floated in the night sky, allowing one to clearly see the innumerable stars.

Was snow falling on that mountain range to the north that was also illuminated by the innumerable stars?

Even if it was not snowing, the ice and snow accrued on those peaks were probably cold enough.

Why was that mountain range called the Starfall Mountains?

Ages ago, when the Heavenly Tomes crashed into the heart of the continent, streaks of fire spread in all directions. Many had fallen in Mount Han. Had some fallen here as well?

If the Starfall Mountains were excavated, would one find the remains of stars, or nothing?

.....

.....

In a building deep within the Imperial City was a carved sculpture decorated with golden threads from Xuelao City.

Madam Mu quietly examined it, her expression very calm. It was like she did not care what had happened in today's snowstorm, or perhaps felt that nothing had happened at all.

"This is the most famous piece of art of my race's Master Casso, from four hundred years ago."

The Demon Lord walked into the hall. "I didn't expect that it was in Empress's hands this entire time."

"It truly is art. Alas, there are few in this city that can enjoy it

with me."

Madam Mu drew her gaze away from those complicated lines on the sculpture that seemed to be imbued with the limitless beauty of the stars. She looked at the Demon Lord and said, "Your Majesty also does not seem to have this sort of interest."

The Demon Lord smiled. "What do you want to say?"

Madam Mu calmly replied, "Why did Your Majesty not strike today?"

The Demon Lord explained, "I didn't expect for Chen Changsheng to be so afraid of death. He actually moved the entire Li Palace over."

Madam Mu indifferently asked, "Was this enough for Your Majesty to lose confidence?"

The Demon Lord calmly gazed back. "Several days ago on the observation platform, you stopped me from striking, so why do you want to persuade me now?"

Madam Mu's voice became even lighter, like the tasteless air of the Western Sea when there was no wind. "That was then; this is now."

The Demon Lord's expression suddenly turned profound. "Four days ago, you did not strike, so what time was that?"

Madam Mu did not directly answer his question. "If Your Majesty struck today, I would naturally strike as well."

They both wanted Chen Changsheng to die. In the end, it was just a question of who struck first.

Chen Changsheng was very difficult to kill. His cultivation level was higher than rumored and now he had moved over the entire Li Palace, adding to the difficulty.

The cultivation levels of those Orthodoxy Prefects and the treasures they carried with them presented a rather thorny

problem, even for someone like Madam Mu.

Back in the Li Palace, she had keenly sensed the murderous energy formed from the principles of the world.

And this was not even considering that more and more demi-human personages and commoners in White Emperor City were standing on Chen Changsheng's side.

There was not a single cloud in the night sky, letting the profuse stars shine with absolute clarity. There was also nothing to stop the winds from blowing in from the sea, and they were somewhat strong.

The sea breeze blew between the palaces and stone platforms before finally coming to her.

Madam Mu could smell the salt in the breeze and that familiar moisture, but she did not miss it.

The sea winds could too easily render lively creatures into lifeless, salted fish, and humid air could easily become thick and sticky, bringing with it a great deal of pressure.

A hint of exhaustion appeared in the depths of her eyes. "Then we'll just wait."

"Until when does Empress plan to wait?"

The Demon Lord lightly arched his brow. "Wait until they dig out that mountain and see if that person is dead or not?"

As one able to gain the loyalty of Black Robe and the Demon Commander, able to compel his mighty father into the abyss, able to gain the fervent loyalty of the entire snowy plains in a few short years, the young Demon Lord was certainly not lacking in intelligence. But now, he was realizing that he was finding it more and more difficult to understand what Madam Mu was thinking.

Madam Mu indifferently said, "Even I don't know what I want to see."

The Demon Lord stared into her eyes. "Shouldn't you be stopping them?"

Madam Mu asked, "Why?"

The Demon Lord suddenly felt like he had made a mistake.

No one in the world could control, or even understand, a woman born under Aquarius.

Madam Mu did not know what he was thinking. She calmly looked north.

She truly did not know what answer she was waiting for, but she was sure that she wanted to wait for an answer.

Regardless of whether he was alive or dead.

.....

.....

Before going to the Starfall Mountains, Chen Changsheng had once thought that as long as there was an answer, it was no good.

And then he saw the black cliff, the intractable sealing array. There was no answer, no truth, the best result.

But there was only one truth and the answer would be revealed sooner or later, and he had already vaguely guessed at what it was.

This made him rather depressed, especially when he thought about Luoluo in the Imperial City, who was waiting expectantly for him to rescue the White Emperor.

The stars retreated and the morning light rose, only to be chopped into pieces by even brighter sword glows and drift in front of the black cliff like the corpses of fireflies.

Chen Changsheng sat cross-legged in front of the black cliff, his sheath sitting across his knees.

Today, his eyes were not closed in meditation. He was calmly staring at the black cliff as if wanting to see through it.

Several hundred famous swords from the Garden of Zhou flew around his body and continuously attacked the black cliff. They were not truly attacking the strength in the cliff. Rather, nearby and in the distance, on the lake and upon lofty peaks, they grinded away at the array, just like they had been for the last few days.

The sealing array that shared the same source as the Tong Palace had become much weaker and lost much of its original power.

In comparison, the momentum of the swords seemed even more extraordinary. Taking up their positions, they formed the South Stream Temple sword array, which slowly and inexorably crushed forward.

The Starfall Mountains were filled with awe-inspiring sword intent and one could see dazzling sword glows wherever one looked.

Daoist Siyuan had been to Mount Li before, and he was rather surprised to find that this sight reminded him of the famous Myriad Sword Array.

Besides Daoist Siyuan, Linghai Zhiwang, the rest of the Orthodoxy's Prefects, and Wenshui City's Fivekind Man were also standing guard at Chen Changsheng's side.

The Bear tribe, the Shi clan, and several other great tribes had dispatched their bravest and most powerful warriors to occupy the area around the black cliff.

Several hundred demi-human experts had gathered in a circle with a radius of several li in the mountain range, and there were ten-some powerful experts on the level of Jin Yulu and Xiaode.

Farther away, on the other side of the lake, dust was rising, accompanied by the occasional roar of a monster. The armies of the various tribes had probably already seized all the mountain valleys.

At this point, the situation was crystal-clear. Whether or not the

ministers and generals of the court or the leaders of the tribes were willing to believe it...

The truth would soon appear before their eyes.

Chapter 1015 – I Invite the White Emperor to See All Living Beings

Countless gazes fell on the black cliff, upon Chen Changsheng, but nobody dared to speak or to step forward and disturb him.

Linghai Zhiwang had earlier stated loud and clear that anyone who dared to take one step toward the black cliff would be regarded as an assassin.

The Prime Minister and the Shi clan leader glanced at each other. There was no happiness in their eyes, only concern and unease.

The concern was because nobody knew what they would see once Chen Changsheng opened this black cliff. If it was the worst result, what would they do? Would the generals, ministers, and tribes that supported them almost immediately bow at the Empress's feet?

Unease arose from two sources.

As the largest and strongest tribe in the Demi-human race, why did the Xiang clan continue to support Madam Mu?

And why had Madam Mu done nothing to stop all this, only quietly watched as they broke the array?

.....

.....

Not everyone had gone to the Starfall Mountains.

In the courtyard of yellow sands, the young Demon Lord calmly inspected those two stone statues, which had returned to their places by the back gate. It was impossible to tell what he was thinking.

In the nearby estate, the Xiang clan leader looked at his own son. He hesitated for a long time but ultimately chose to say nothing.

In the stone hall at the highest point of the Imperial City, Luoluo sat by a window, quietly waiting for something.

In a swamp deep in the mountains, Chusu licked at his wounded stump, his body trembling in pain.

In that small courtyard next to the Celestial Tree temple, Xuanyuan Po sat on his front porch, gazing blankly at that small mound.

In an ordinary inn, after enduring a sleepless night, Xu Yourong used water to wash her face, then sat in front of the bronze mirror and began to comb her hair.

A melancholic voice came from the bronze mirror.

"Since you are still beneath the stars, how can you not see all living beings?"

.....

.....

On the lake, high in the clouds, atop the mountains, countless sword glows abruptly and simultaneously vanished.

A shrill howl resounded through the air.

Countless sword glows returned to the sheath.

Chen Changsheng grasped the middle of the sheath and stood up.

Everyone watched him.

But he was gazing at the lake, the clouds, the mountains.

The swords had returned, but their sword intents were still there.

A flock of geese flew over the snowy peak but was suddenly forced to descend.

A sea breeze blew out from the mountains but was slashed into wisps.

A few drifting clouds in the blue sky were torn by some invisible power into threads which gradually disappeared.

These were all signs that the seal was collapsing.

Only after confirming these things did Chen Changsheng turn his gaze back to the black cliff.

Boom!

Countless thunderous booms came from deep within the black cliff, even deep underground.

The ground quaked and the lake tossed and turned. A nearby mountain shed its snowpack while beasts mournfully wailed.

Rocks were sent flying while dust exploded. It took quite some time for everything to gradually settle.

The black cliff had vanished, leaving only a massive pit, several hundred zhang wide.

At its bottom was an incredibly smooth stone wall, seemingly made of jade or gold. But it also seemed like even the sharpest blade or sword would not leave behind a single mark on its surface.

This was the legendary Starstone, possessing an unimaginable weight and density. Now, however, it was buried beneath dirt and gravel, revealing only a small portion of it to the outside world.

A straight path rose up from behind the Starstone.

The massive pit that was once the black cliff was divided in two by this stone path.

This path was extremely long, extending many li into the distance.

Innumerable gazes followed the stone path, ultimately ending up ten-some li away.

There, half a mountain had collapsed.

This mountain had actually been a palace.

A stone chair was set in the half-mountain.

This stone chair was ten zhang tall and ten zhang wide, massive to an exaggerated level.

One person sat on this chair.

This person wore a white imperial gown. He was extremely thin, his eyes sunken. He seemed like a corpse.

.....

.....

"Your Majesty!"

A cry of shock rose from the crowd.

It was followed by many more.

The air howled.

Countless figures, afraid to be last, rushed toward that half-mountain ten-some li away.

Linghai Zhiwang's earlier warning had been cleanly forgotten.

As one got close to the massive stone chair, one felt like the person sitting in it was very small, almost to a comical level.

But those demi-human ministers and experts thought no such thing. Their faces were filled with excitement, and some even began to cry.

To them, the person in the chair was God.

Even if that person was shriveled up, his eyes closed, so weak that he seemed to be taking his last breaths.

But as long as he was still alive, no, even if he was dead, he would still be the God of the Demi-human race.

Because he was called Bai Xingye.

He was the White Emperor.

.....

.....

It was obvious that the important personages of the Demi-human race had prepared themselves for such a sight.

Several famous demi-human doctors were transported to the stone chair by black vultures, where they began to diagnose the White Emperor.

Seeing that the White Emperor's eyes were still shut, Xiaode became somewhat anxious and asked, "Where is His Holiness the Pope?"

Everyone knew that Chen Changsheng's medical skills were unequaled. In their view, not even the best demi-human doctor was Chen Changsheng's equal.

The Prime Minister and the others turned, and then froze.

They did not see Chen Changsheng.

Chen Changsheng was still ten li away.

He was still where that black cliff had been standing.

.....

.....

Watching the activity in the distance, Chen Changsheng suddenly ordered, "Go."

As he said this, his gaze remained fixed on the massive stone chair, on the White Emperor's face.

This was his first time seeing the White Emperor. For this, he had toiled for many days and nights.

But upon his first look at the White Emperor, he decided to leave.
To immediately leave.

The crowd was flabbergasted at Chen Changsheng's words, confused as to why he was doing this.

Only the blind zither player seemed to understand Chen Changsheng's intentions. Leading Fivekind Man, he headed toward the secret path behind the lake.

.....

.....

Just when an elderly physician had drummed up the courage and was about to insert the stone needle in his hand, the White Emperor opened his eyes.

His eyes were very dim.

They were like snowy plains on an overcast day.

An ashen white.

A little black dot appeared on the plain of snow.

The black dot began to increase in size, its hue deepening. It was like a traveler who had crossed ten thousand li of snowy plains was drawing near.

He truly awakened.

He might have been sealed for five years, with the Starstone sucking away at his star radiance and beast essence. He was already weak to the extreme, on his last breaths.

But when he opened his eyes, an unfathomably majestic energy surged out from his body.

"All of you came?"

His voice was very soft, and because he had not drunk any water for some time, it was rather hoarse.

But all of the Starfall Mountains could hear his voice.

Like a tide, the demi-human experts kneeled.

Chapter 1016 – All Living Beings Are Suffering

Jin Yulu did not kneel. He stood somewhat farther off, gazing at the White Emperor with a somewhat complex expression.

The White Emperor sat on the massive stone chair, his feet several zhang from the ground.

Logically speaking, since it was simply impossible to step on the ground, it naturally followed that it was impossible to stand up.

But he stood up.

Like a majestic snowcapped mountain appearing between the heavens and earth.

The heavens and earth responded.

Ten-some snowy mountains thunderously boomed.

Snow avalanched down while a blizzard engulfed the half-mountain.

The demi-human experts were forced back from the stone chair by the might of the blizzard.

When any part of this furious storm touched the White Emperor's imperial robe, it would immediately vanish, as if absorbed into his body.

The White Emperor took three steps forward through the blizzard.

As the blizzard entered his body, he grew larger and larger, his imperial robe renewing, his eyes going from gray to purest white, imbued with a chilling and threatening power.

He gazed into the distance as he indifferently asked, "What's happened these last few years?"

The Prime Minister prostrated in the snow and used the simplest

words and fastest speed to recount all the major events.

After listening to it all, the White Emperor appeared unmoved, his expression remaining serene.

Jin Yulu's voice suddenly came through the blizzard.

"Bie Yanghong is dead, as is Wuqiong Bi."

The White Emperor's only response was to arch his brows.

The blizzard gradually dissipated.

Jin Yulu jeered, "Back then, I said that you should marry a virtuous wife. Doesn't it seem now like your eyesight is even worse than Bie Yanghong's?"

The White Emperor remained silent, though he now peered in a certain direction.

All the demi-human experts and the soldiers by the lake followed his gaze.

In that direction was White Emperor City.

The truth had already appeared before everyone.

Madam Mu truly had schemed to imprison the White Emperor for several years.

The crowd found it utterly appropriate for the White Emperor to lead a great army and march on White Emperor City.

But the White Emperor did not move.

He ceased to contemplate that city. His gaze moved to a place ten-some li away and he asked, "You are Chen Changsheng?"

Many people followed his gaze and realized that Chen Changsheng had not come over.

More importantly, many people, including the Prefects of the Orthodoxy, had already left. Only he and Tang Thirty-Six were still there.

.....

.....

Separated by ten-some li, Chen Changsheng and the White Emperor looked at each other.

He did not answer the White Emperor.

His silence caused the mood in this mountain range to become rather strange.

The Demi-human Prime Minister stepped forward, intending to speak.

Someone else spoke before him.

Tang Thirty-Six's voice rang out. "The White Emperor's words are discourteous."

Many years ago, Zhu Luo outside Hanqiu City and the Holy Maiden inside Xunyang City had asked the same question, with not a single word out of place.

At the time, Zhu Luo's and the Holy Maiden's questions symbolized their curiosity towards Chen Changsheng, as well as a sort of acknowledgment.

At that time, his name had only recently appeared on the continent.

But the present was not the past.

No longer was he that young Daoist from Xining Village, that new student of the Orthodox Academy. He was the Pope of the Human race.

Even the White Emperor was being extremely disrespectful by asking this question.

So though the demi-human personages were enraged by Tang Thirty-Six's rebuke, they had no means of refuting it.

The White Emperor calmly looked at Chen Changsheng,

suddenly asking, "Is Your Holiness the Pope only here to watch?"

He had ignored Tang Thirty-Six, but he had addressed Chen Changsheng differently.

Chen Changsheng still said nothing.

When he was with Tang Thirty-Six, he would talk more often.

But if he needed to interact with the outside world, he would speak very rarely.

Because Tang Thirty-Six would speak for him, and all of the Orthodox Academy knew that Tang Thirty-Six was much better at talking.

"If not for His Holiness the Pope, there would be nothing to watch today."

Tang Thirty-Six calmly concluded, "So Your Majesty's words are completely wrong."

In his words, the White Emperor was referring to how Chen Changsheng was standing at a distance and had also had Linghai Zhiwang and the rest leave in advance.

Tang Thirty-Six's response had been on the mark. Since the demi-humans were the ones being aided, they had no basis to question the arrangements of the human side.

But these words were lacking in respect, especially because he was speaking to the White Emperor.

Furious gazes gathered on Tang Thirty-Six's body.

Tang Thirty-Six's expression did not change.

At this moment, Chen Changsheng confirmed that Linghai Zhiwang's party had entered the secret tunnel, so he finally broke his silence.

He looked at the mountain ten-some li away and said, "This junior bids farewell."

After so saying, he brought Tang Thirty-Six with him and left.

The White Crane was waiting for them nearby.

Their departure was immediate.

It was all simple and straightforward to the extreme.

Through painstaking effort, he had finally saved the White Emperor and seen the answer.

Everything really was a scheme of Madam Mu's.

To the Human race, this seemed to be the best answer.

Logically speaking, he should have stayed to discuss with the demi-humans their next grand undertaking.

But he did not do this, and he had even had Linghai Zhiwang take the rest and leave in advance.

Because this answer was too good, too much of what he wanted.

So he decided to leave.

He wanted to do something.

He wanted to write his own answer.

.....

.....

In the stone hall at the highest point of the Imperial City...

There were no pear blossoms by the window, though a few flowering scholar trees had been planted.

Madam Mu was confident that this had nothing to do with Scholartree Manor.

Just like how what was taking place in the Starfall Mountains actually had nothing to do with Chen Changsheng.

In the end, it was a problem between her and him.

"I don't know if your father is dead or alive, but I think that he's

probably alive."

She walked to the window and gazed dispassionately into the distance. "Even if he's alive, he could still not appear. If he does not appear, then he still has some affection for me. If he does appear, then he is truly heartless. Even now, I still don't know which answer I want."

As she spoke, she gently caressed Luoluo's black hair.

Luoluo's head was lowered, her face was pale, and her eyelashes were fluttering. It was easy to see that she was rather nervous.

The scholar trees outside the window suddenly began to shudder, shedding countless green leaves, as if a painting had come to life.

Madam Mu's gaze pierced through the green leaves and into the distance. After a long period of silence, she abruptly said, "Truly a heartless man."

Luoluo found it impossible to restrain herself, and raised her head to look at her mother.

"You took advantage of Father's severe injuries to imprison him, used Starstone to drain his beast essence, wanted to put him in a death trap, but now... you're calling him heartless?"

Her voice trembled from anger and sadness. "Mother, you did all this for the Great Western Continent? Was it worth it?"

Madam Mu calmly gazed at her and declared, "I've never loved you, because you are a daughter."

Luoluo tightly pursed her lips, her small face covered in stubbornness. She did not respond.

Madam Mu knew what she meant and said, "Little Shi does not take on my view of the world, so she naturally doesn't need to bear my demands."

Luoluo didn't understand and asked in anguish, "But why?"

"Because females are mostly extroverted," Madam Mu calmly

said. "I don't want to be this sort of person, and I hope that you won't be this sort of person. In the future, no matter who you end up marrying, remember that it's only your parents' clan that can help you, because all the men in the world are cruel and heartless."

Once more, she had brought up the cruelty and heartlessness of men.

Even when the truth was seemingly right before her eyes, Luoluo was still rather puzzled. Her voice shaking, she asked, "Mother, just what is happening here?"

Madam Mu looked out the window into the distance, and said, "I hope that you never know or understand what is happening here."

Chapter 1017 – I Have Come to My City

In the distance was the sea.

On the sea was a ship.

The Second Prince of the Great Western Continent stood at the bow of the ship, his clothes drifting in the wind, his eyebrows furrowed in thought.

Mu Jiushi sat in a cabin, occasionally turning her head to look at where they had come from, sorrow on her face.

.....

.....

To a small stream, the Red River was extremely wide while the sea was beyond comparison.

But as the stream flowed down from the Starfall Mountains to White Emperor City, it became the Red River.

From the pier to the streets to the plaza to the meadow of Heavensguard Pavilion, people prostrated like a tide.

The White Emperor had returned to White Emperor City.

He had not returned directly to the Imperial City, but had decided to take a boat.

The path from the shore to the Imperial City was broad and open.

He slowly walked past the kneeling populace, with his hands held behind his back and no impatience on his visage. It was like he wanted to see if anything had changed about his city in the last few years.

As he casually strolled through White Emperor City, those ministers still loyal to Madam Mu either committed suicide or were beheaded by their relatives.

After a few intense conflicts, the elite Red River Beast Guard also kneeled in front of the Imperial City, their lower legs covered with the blood of their once-closest comrades.

There was nothing that could be considered a true battle, and the situation was pacified even faster than it took for the order of surrender to spread.

Without a word from him, everything was resolved.

Because this had always been his city.

Every street of this city, every old and mottled stone of its walls, still contained his Qi.

This Qi was now returning to his body.

His body grew larger and larger, his Qi growing more and more powerful.

The massive Jings in the river droned, expressing their servitude and welcome.

The black vultures in the high towers buried their heads in their wings, their bodies trembling in fear.

He had always been the strongest existence in the world, and the Qi he silently exuded had an aura of unequalled tyranny.

All of White Emperor City, all the living beings inside and outside its walls, could only shiver in fear of this aura, not daring to make a single noise.

In front of the Imperial City, a figure finally appeared that was not kneeling.

This figure had always been gigantic, like a mountain.

The Xiang clan leader stood in front of the gate. As he watched the White Emperor, the emotions in his eyes were somewhat complex.

He was the Chief Elder of the Council of Elders, and his Xiang

clan was the largest clan in the Demi-human race. He himself was the strongest demi-human expert outside of the White Emperor couple.

It was now apparent that he must have been a participant in Madam Mu's plan to imprison the injured White Emperor, a true betrayer.

In every aspect, he had the right to not kneel, a reason to not kneel.

The White Emperor walked up to the Xiang clan leader.

The Xiang clan leader looked at the White Emperor's somewhat thin face and his expression subtly changed. He opened his mouth, ready to say something.

The White Emperor leaned his body forward as if wanting to see him more clearly.

This extremely simple action had an unstoppable momentum.

If the Xiang clan leader was a mountain, the White Emperor was world's tallest snowcapped peak.

His body leaning forward was this peak pressing forward.

He looked down upon the Xiang clan leader.

Like a god peering his head over a snowy mountain.

There was no emotion in his eyes, only a vast white plain of snow.

The traveler in the snow gradually drew further away, just like all the past memories, kindness, and pity. Only apathy and bitter cold were left.

A bolt of lightning illuminated the snow, shone upon the traveler's figure.

It was a streak of light flashing past those cruel, black pupils.

It was a hand descending from the sky.

The look in the Xiang clan leader's eyes suddenly changed. With a roar, he threw his hands forth, two thick pillars of stone ascending to meet the hand.

There was no fear or regret in his eyes, only shock and confusion, an extremely strange expression.

A gale howled across the snowy plains.

It stirred up countless piles of snow.

Those piles of snow began to collapse, one by one.

With a light crack, those two stone pillars were covered in a fine network of fractures, and then they gradually began to crumble.

With a boom, the stone walls by the gate of the Imperial City began to collapse, stone chunks flying in every direction.

Dust plumed, obscuring all gazes. Furious Qi clashed with that terrifying pressure, cutting off all spiritual senses and preventing any noise from leaking out.

Blood poured out from the Xiang clan leader's ears, nose, and mouth in a horrifying spectacle.

Strangely, not a single drop of blood flowed out from his shattered arms.

In his final moments, he finally understood the reason for all this, and his eyes revealed an expression of disbelief and anguish.

"After several centuries, you still were not willing to trust in my loyalty!"

The Xiang clan leader's shout of despair, grief, and indignation failed to evoke a single change in the White Emperor's expression.

"'Trust' has always been the most useless of words."

.....

.....

The dust settled, the rocks ceased to fall.

A few coughs came from deep within the Imperial City. The White Emperor had already gone inside.

The Demi-human Prime Minister, the Shi clan leader, and the other personages hurriedly followed inside.

Xiaode stopped and looked at the Xiang clan leader's corpse.

There naturally had to be someone to tidy up this mess in front of the gate, but it could not be him.

He had stopped because the look in the Xiang clan leader's eyes was somewhat strange.

The Xiang clan leader had died, but he had not died content.

His eyes were filled with shock and fury.

This was what confused Xiaode. Before the Heavenly Selection ceremony, the Xiang clan leader had pretended that he had received the White Emperor's decree, and he had also conspired with Madam Mu. He should have died ten thousand deaths, something he should have been well aware of, so why did he hold such emotions as he died?

.....

.....

At a certain moment before the White Emperor returned to his city...

Many other events were taking place within it.

For example, some people had left the Starfall Mountains early, using a secret passage to return to White Emperor City before everyone else.

For example, some people had made plans in advance, like the now-deceased Xiang clan leader.

He had gone straight to the Imperial City, bringing no experts of the Xiang clan with him, nor any of his loyal subordinates.

He had even sent his most cherished youngest son Xiang Qiu to that large courtyard near his estate.

Because he knew that this was the safest place. Whether the Empress or the White Emperor won in today's battle, none of the effects would reach this place.

Xiang Qiu was the strongest in the young generation of the Demi-human race. He had spent his childhood cultivating secret techniques deep within the mountains and possessed a cruel temperament rarely seen in the Xiang clan. However, he had little experience in worldly matters.

He had no understanding of the reasoning behind his father's plans. He was prepared to leave and go to the Imperial City to assist his father, and he wanted the Demon Lord to come with him.

The Demon Lord knew what the Xiang clan leader was thinking. His deep admiration for this plan led him to think that Xiang Qiu was incredibly stupid.

If the White Emperor really was still alive, White Emperor City would undoubtedly face a heaven-shaking battle.

In truth, the Demon Lord believed that the White Emperor was assuredly alive.

But he would not participate in this battle.

Just like the Xiang clan leader thought, neither the White Emperor nor Madam Mu would touch him, regardless of which won.

Not even the derisive look in the Demon Lord's eyes could make Xiang Qiu understand. He angrily spat and then led his most loyal subordinates out of the courtyard.

He was somewhat concerned for his father's safety, but he also didn't want to miss out on this event that was sure to be recorded in the history books, so he had decided to hurry to the Imperial City.

But he was not able to leave, because the courtyard had been surrounded.

A blind zither player, hugging an ancient zither, stood apart from the crowd.

He looked somewhat tired, his shoulders sagging a little.

Perhaps it was because he had just returned from the Starfall Mountains.

Chapter 1018 – Miscellaneous Freeloaders, a Willingness to Pay Five Hundred Years

Xiang Qiu did not notice the blind zither player.

More accurately, he did not see the blind zither player.

This blind zither player was simply too inconspicuous.

But it was also because the archbishop standing before him was too striking.

The lines on this archbishop's face seemed to be carved from stone, and every one of its elegant features exuded an icy chill.

"Linghai Zhiwang! What are you planning?"

Xiang Qiu's gaze swept over those Orthodoxy experts standing outside the courtyard, the look in his eyes becoming razor-sharp, a cruel and bloodthirsty aura in their depths.

Linghai Zhiwang dispassionately said, "By divine edict, no one is allowed to enter or exit this courtyard. Those in defiance will be killed."

Yes, no matter who won between the White Emperor and Madam Mu, neither would touch the young Demon Lord.

This large courtyard was truly the safest place in White Emperor City today.

But the Xiang clan leader and the Demon Lord had forgotten one thing.

There were still many human experts in White Emperor City today.

No matter who won between the White Emperor and Madam Mu, these human experts dearly wished to kill the young Demon Lord.

Xiang Qiu still did not understand this reasoning, and he sternly

said, "All of you should clearly understand that he is my Xiang clan's guest."

Linghai Zhiwang's expression remained impassive. He had no intention to yield.

Xiang Qiu shouted, "Do you want to die!"

After saying this, he led his subordinates in a charge.

And then, he died.

.....

.....

Xiang Qiu was truly the strongest member of the Xiang clan in his generation. Both his cultivation level and techniques were extremely formidable.

His subordinates were also the elite experts of the Xiang clan.

But standing outside the courtyard were Linghai Zhiwang, Daoist Siyuan, Archbishop An Lin, and Hu Thirty-Two.

In other words, he was facing a greater part of the Li Palace, leaving him with zero chance of victory.

Of course, if his opponents were just the Prefects of the Orthodoxy, perhaps he would not have lost so quickly, and even if he lost, he would not have died so quickly.

The problem was that Linghai Zhiwang and the other Prefects had not even moved. Their attention was focused completely on the courtyard.

Xiang Qiu and the Xiang clan experts were confronting a group of miscellaneous freeloaders.

These were seven peddlers, six government laborers, three fortune-tellers, two elders selling sesame candy, and one girl buying cosmetic powder.

Even though these people clearly came from Wenshui City and

were probably experts from the Tang clan, this sort of arrangement could easily be taken for a group of miscellaneous freeloaders.

Ten-some berserk demi-human energies soared to the sky!

There was a crisp clattering—not the iron hoops on the gate clanking in the wind, but the copper coins in the seven peddlers' hands striking the ground.

The copper coins rolled around the ground, moving in accord with the laws of the world to naturally form an array.

Two fortune-tellers stood in the eye of the array. As they watched those demi-human experts lunge through the air, they rolled their eyes.

This was not an expression of disdain, but a sign of their extremely fast calculation speeds.

The six government laborers expressionlessly stepped forward, their hands raised to meet them.

Six cudgels decided life and death and when they poked out of the clouds, they intended to smash everything before them into the Netherworld.

Even more frightening were the chains wrapped around the six cudgels. They seemed capable of binding all living souls.

The clash of violent Qis created countless bizarre sights and terrifying whorls in space on the street in front of the courtyard.

At this moment, the two sesame-candy-selling elders took one step forward. They raised the fronts of their robes to their waists, then very casually and unremarkably punched.

Their two fists exploded with light, driving away the winds from the Red River. Like two blazing suns, they hungered to devour everything in flames.

And then, cosmetic powder, like peach blossoms, or plum

blossoms, in red and in white, enveloped the scene.

Finally, there was a mournful note of a zither, like the weeping of the snow, like a final farewell.

.....

.....

Blood painted the street in front of the courtyard.

Ten-some Xiang clan experts lay collapsed in their blood.

Xiang Qiu's injuries were the heaviest. His clothes were in tatters, his harder-than-steel body covered in several dozen extremely fine wounds. Blood was gushing out from those fine and straight wounds, swiftly turning into all manner of garish colors the moment it touched the air. He had clearly been poisoned.

He stared at the government laborers and peddlers with eyes of pain and shock.

He had never imagined that he would witness such frightening techniques and arts in such a short moment of time.

If his eyes were not going blurry from the loss of blood, then could that really be... the Blazing Sun Style!

The techniques of those Tang clan experts were truly too terrifying. Before he and his subordinates even had time to enter berserk metamorphosis, they had suffered a crushing defeat!

Xiang Qiu's gaze ultimately fell on the blind zither player standing apart from the crowd and the old zither in his bosom.

The strings of this old zither seemed so sharp that they seemed impossible to stain with blood, no matter how many bodies they hacked through.

When he looked at the old zither, Xiang Qiu suddenly felt rather cold.

A note was played from the zither.

He realized that even if those peddlers and government laborers were not here, the blind zither player alone was enough to kill all of them.

Even if he and his subordinates had entered berserk metamorphosis beforehand, they would have still been killed to a man, none of them able to escape.

Even if his father were here, he might not be a match for this blind zither player.

An intense regret appeared in Xiang Qiu's eyes.

He had not noticed this blind zither player earlier, so he had not noticed that the zither player had been drooping his shoulders.

This posture might have meant fatigue, but it also made it easier to hold the zither.

Humans that liked to droop their shoulders were often truly extraordinary individuals.

Like Wang Po, Bie Yanghong, or this blind zither player.

He stammered out, "Truly powerful... Just who are you?"

The blind zither player did not answer his question.

Perhaps some people would be willing to answer the question of a person on the verge of death to exhibit their kindness or grace.

But not the blind zither player.

Many years ago, during an internal conflict within the sect, he had been ambushed and heavily injured by the sect master. Only after terrible struggle had he managed to survive.

From that moment, he forgot the word 'kindness'.

Many years ago, because he was in seclusion to recover from his injuries, he had avoided the disaster that was Su Li, and then he had gone to Wenshui City, where he had lived like an old dog struggling at death's door.

After that, he lost the right to any sort of grace.

The Tang Old Master's request for him to come to White Emperor City and protect Chen Changsheng was nothing but a job in his view.

He was just doing his job, making some money to provide for his retirement.

So he would not answer Xiang Qiu's question.

He had even once felt that there was nothing that could still draw his interest.

But today, something seemed different.

He looked at the courtyard, his gaze piercing through the gate and onto that tree deep within.

A figure was beneath that tree.

His sea of consciousness had grown calm and serene ages ago, almost frozen, but now, it gradually began to thaw.

His mind had become a dried-up small stream ages ago, but now, water began to flow and beat against the rocks on the banks.

Because a spark had been lit on the withered wood that was his heart, the fire getting larger and larger.

The moment he saw that figure, he seemed to come alive, and his emotions began to surge.

There was no wind, but his clothes began to flap in the air.

His complexion grew rosier and rosier.

His eyes grew brighter and brighter.

He became much younger.

It seemed like he could live another five hundred years.

But he did not want these five hundred years.

If he could kill that person today.

Chapter 1019 – We Wish to Invite You to Die

The peddlers, government laborers, and fortune-tellers were the first to notice the strangeness of the blind zither player, and astonishment appeared in their eyes.

They were the most enigmatic and most terrifying Fivekind Man of the Wenshui Tang clan, but it was the blind zither player that was... the man.

Although the zither player had never been willing to call himself their teacher, their leader, and rarely even spoke, they all felt the deepest respect for him, no less than the respect they felt for the Tang Old Master.

This was the first time they had seen the blind zither player reveal such a powerful will to fight, such a genuine vitality.

The cosmetic-buying girl was very uneasy. She wanted to step forward and ask a question, but she was stopped by the two sesame-candy-selling elders.

.....

.....

The Orthodoxy's experts also sensed the Qi exuded by the blind zither player. Their expressions turned stern and they felt the same as Xiang Qiu did: this person is strong! Even amongst the Prefects of the Orthodoxy, only Mao Qiuyu would be able to match this blind zither player!

Linghai Zhiwang, An Lin, and the other Prefects were also shocked speechless, but since they knew his identity, they also felt that this was to be expected.

Before it began to wither away, the Longevity Sect was the ancestral court of the Orthodoxy's southern faction, resisting the Li Palace together with Holy Maiden Peak. The Mount Li Sword Sect, whose name now awed the continent, was only one of the

Longevity Sect's subordinates. As the last Grand Elder of the Longevity Sect, it was only natural that the blind zither player be strong. He should be this strong!

The Prefects also knew why the blind zither player had suddenly come to life, seemingly taking them back to the Longevity Sect's prime.

It was because of the figure beneath that tree in the courtyard.

Because they felt the same.

When they saw that figure, their breathing became hurried while their cultivation naturally pushed them to unprecedented levels.

Whether it was the blind zither player or the Prefects of the Orthodoxy, this was their first time seeing the Demon Lord with their own eyes.

It was precisely on the day they were prepared to kill him.

Chen Changsheng had them return to White Emperor City in advance with exactly the goal of killing the Demon Lord.

To the Human race, this was the greatest, most glorious, and most splendid mission.

To the continent, this was the most shocking, most tense, and most dangerous moment.

If they could kill the Demon Lord, today's scene and their names would be passed on through the annals of history for ages to come.

Even if the blind zither player's heart was like a withered piece of wood or dead ash, it would begin to burn once more.

Even if the names of these Prefects of the Orthodoxy were already foreordained to be recorded in the Daoist scriptures, they were still willing to pay everything, even their lives.

.....

.....

The young Demon Lord stood beneath the tree, turning to face the crowd outside the courtyard.

His face was very handsome, faintly exuding an inhuman Qi.

The sand in the courtyard suddenly stirred and began to dance around his body, drawing countless complex patterns on his black imperial robe.

Linghai Zhiwang's pupils constricted at this sight, and everyone felt an intense danger.

Before he led Black Robe and the Demon Commander in deposing his father, the young Demon Lord had been completely unremarkable. Whether in talent, fighting prowess, or any other aspect, he was utterly mediocre and obscure. Let alone Qiushan Jun and Xu Yourong, he could not even compare to Chen Changsheng.

The matter for which he was most known on the continent was his desire for Xu Yourong.

It was only after he pushed that legendary existence into the abyss and then planned a cruel encirclement and slaughter of his older brother Han Qing that the entire continent understood that they had been wrong.

Now, the entire continent knew that this Demon Lord possessed unimaginable talent for fighting and unfathomable strength, but just how strong was he?

It was evident that he had still not stepped into the Divine Domain.

In the battle on the observation platform, when Chen Changsheng used the South Stream Temple sword array, the Demon Lord seemed to be at a disadvantage.

But based on Chen Changsheng's retrospective analysis, even his full strength would not have been enough to kill the Demon Lord. Moreover, it was obvious that the Demon Lord still had many

cards that he had not used.

Chen Changsheng had even said that the moment he decided to kill the Demon Lord, he felt like he could die at any moment.

Just what sort of card was the Demon Lord holding that could make him feel this?

"Dongyangzi." The Demon Lord faintly smiled at the blind zither player. "With just you alone, you want to kill Us?"

The entire crowd was stunned.

Because the Demon Lord had an expression and posture of deep contempt.

But it was also because that the Demon Lord had spoken a name.

It was the zither player's Daoist name when he was still part of the Longevity Sect.

This name had vanished from the continent many years ago. Other than Prefects like Linghai Zhiwang, no one present knew of this name, not even the peddlers and government laborers from the Wenshui Tang clan. Yet the Demon Lord had exposed it immediately!

The blind zither player tilted his head in silence. After a long time, he asked, "Is it not allowed?"

"It's certainly allowed, but it is unwise."

The Demon Lord clasped his hands behind his back and slowly walked to the courtyard gate.

"Back then, your sect master wanted to work with my royal father. You happened to learn of this matter and became greatly dissatisfied. You wanted to break up this relationship but ended up being ambushed and severely wounded. Afterward, you were encircled by my Divine race on the snowy plains and all your star openings ended up being destroyed. Although the protection of the Tang Old Master and your friends in your sect let you barely hang

on to life, even allowed you to fully recover your abilities, you yourself were well aware that no matter how many years you used to advance your cultivation to how high a level, you had no hopes of reaching the Divine."

The blind zither player quietly listened as if he was listening to someone else's story.

The Demon Lord indifferently said, "Was this matter not enough to make you fear the strength of my Divine race?"

This secret story from long ago stunned the crowd, and they subconsciously looked toward the zither player.

The blind zither player was expressionless. This tale seemed unable to move him, but his two frosty brows slightly trembled.

Anyone could sense the pain hidden behind his dispassionate features.

To cultivators, the inability to reach the Divine no matter how diligently one cultivated or bravely pressed forward caused the greatest despair.

And he had possessed such an outstanding talent that if one looked across the continent, one could count the number of such geniuses on their fingers. If he had not been betrayed and cruelly beaten by the demons, the Divine Domain so incomparably far from other cultivators would have been right before his eyes.

This was the greatest pain.

The blind zither player said, "Pain can make one feel fear and despair can make one lose all interest in life, but there are times when they become energy for anger."

The Demon Lord looked at him and said, "But that still cannot alter your pitiful life."

A crane cried out in the sky.

The snow on the eaves rustled down, a cold wind gusted by, and

the White Crane descended.

Chen Changsheng gazed into the courtyard and declared, "As long as we can kill you today, all pain can be repaid."

Tang Thirty-Six added, "No matter how you look at it, this is a profitable transaction."

The blind zither player was quiet for a few moments, then said, "Yes."

His expression was very serene.

This time, he was truly serene. Those two frosty brows did not tremble in the slightest.

Serenity did not mean that his killing intent had been swept away by the wind.

On the contrary, it meant that this desire to kill was hidden in the principles of the world with no hope of withdrawing it.

The Demon Lord was alone in White Emperor City.

Chen Changsheng had brought four Prefects of the Orthodoxy and the terrifying Fivekind Man of the Wenshui Tang clan.

No matter how one saw it, this was enough to kill the Demon Lord.

Chapter 1020 – The Grand Array of the Li Palace

"So you've actually wanted to kill me this entire time."

The Demon Lord looked at Chen Changsheng and said, "I thought you gave up on that idea after that day."

Chen Changsheng replied, "Having once given up does not mean that one will not try again."

The Demon Lord sighed. "You really are Shang Xingzhou's student. As expected, you are just as formidable a hypocrite."

Chen Changsheng said, "The opportunity that day was not that great."

"And you think today's opportunity is excellent?"

The Demon Lord smiled. "You should be well aware that neither the White Emperor nor Madam Mu will let you kill me."

"Are you talking about equilibrium?"

Chen Changsheng noted, "It's very difficult to maintain an equilibrium, and those who walk the tightrope rarely have good ends. It is true that whether it's the White Emperor that wins or Madam Mu, neither of them will let me kill you, but they have still not decided who wins and who loses."

The Demon Lord asked, "You think that someone like the White Emperor won't have the mind to pay attention to any other matters while dealing with Madam Mu?"

A few moments of silence passed, then Chen Changsheng declared, "Even if this is his stance, I am not prepared to accept it."

In the Starfall Mountains, he had used the South Stream Temple sword array to break the sealing array. He had confirmed that the White Emperor was still there, obtaining the best answer.

Unexpectedly, he had Linghai Zhiwang, the Tang clan's Fivekind Man, and all the others return to White Emperor City.

And then he hurried back with Tang Thirty-Six.

It was precisely because he wanted to carry out this task.

Those seemingly perfect answers had all been given out by someone else.

He wanted to write his own answer, one that could not be faked.

He wanted to kill the Demon Lord.

"No one knows if the White Emperor can stop you, but at least for now, he has not stopped you."

The Demon Lord stared into his eyes and profoundly asked, "Did you ever think about why he is doing things this way?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "Perhaps we are all thinking too much. Maybe there is no equilibrium. Maybe His Majesty the White Emperor also wants to see you die."

"No, he does not stop you because he knows that you cannot kill me."

The Demon Lord smiled at the human experts standing outside the courtyard. "All of you together cannot kill me."

.....

.....

Several years ago, the White Emperor engaged in a world-shaking battle with the Demon Lord on the snowy plains. He was heavily injured and was then imprisoned by Madam Mu in a Starstone array for several years. Now that he was released, he should have needed time to recover his strength. Moreover, there were many matters in White Emperor City that he needed to handle, like vengeance.

But he was a true Saint, the hegemon of the west. If he really

wanted to stop Chen Changsheng from killing the Demon Lord, he had a variety of methods.

He did nothing, only quietly watched Chen Changsheng have Linghai Zhiwang's group leave, then watched Chen Changsheng fly off on a crane.

Why was this? Was it really as the Demon Lord said?

Chen Changsheng had no idea where the Demon Lord's serene confidence or the White Emperor's tacit approval came from.

He was confident that none of the demon experts would appear today, not the Demon Commander, the legendary Eight Great Mountain Men, or even the most enigmatic Black Robe.

Even an expert of the Divine Domain would need some time to fly across tens of thousands of li.

Crucially, he knew that these demon experts had no means of coming here today.

Thus, all the clues pointed at an undisclosed possibility.

Seeing Chen Changsheng's expression, the Demon Lord knew that Chen Changsheng had guessed at something. He calmly asked, "You still insist on killing me?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "If this really is the case, then it's even more important that I kill you. Of course... your place will drop down on the list."

The Demon Lord curiously asked, "Because of Bie Yanghong and Wuqiong Bi?"

Chen Changsheng answered, "One who comes from afar is a guest, and the earlier that one dies, the earlier one can go home."

At the start of this part of the conversation, no one understood what they were talking about.

The first to realize was Tang Thirty-Six, and his complexion instantly paled.

He knew the truth of that battle between the Divine, knew why Bie Yanghong and Wuqiong Bi had been so severely injured.

The next to react was Linghai Zhiwang. His eyes became dazzling bright, like the hottest flames engulfing the world. However, right in the center of these flames was a crystal core that not even the highest temperatures seemed capable of melting.

He also understood the meaning of Chen Changsheng's conversation with the Demon Lord, but the change in his eyes was not merely because of the explosion of his will to fight. Much of it came from the Qi of the crystal core. Yes, the crystal core was not a manifestation of thought, but a real existence.

The crystal that blazed with endless Celestial Fire but could not be melted by the flames was one of the Li Palace's legendary treasures.

Soon after, three more Qis of absolute divinity and power emerged, coming from Daoist Siyuan, Archbishop An Lin, and Hu Thirty-Two.

A willow branch suffused with a gloomy luster appeared in the sky.

A thin piece of paper, like a banner and a painting, appeared in the sky.

A divine stamp carrying an ancient and simple aura appeared in the sky.

Gloom Willow!

Mountain River Map!

Universe Stamp!

.....

.....

There were many archbishops in the Li Palace, but only six were called Prefects.

These six archbishops resided in the Sacred Halls of the Li Palace, each protecting a most precious and most powerful treasure of the Orthodoxy.

These treasures were either strange objects like the crystal core in Linghai Zhiwang's eyes, or divine artifacts forged by previous Saints of the Orthodoxy.

These treasures were the foundation of the Li Palace's grand array, the true source of its edge.

Even a Saint like Madam Mu had to be cautious when she confronted these treasures in the Li Palace.

Today, although Mao Qiuyu, the most powerful of the Prefects, had not come and the Wall of Illustrious Heroes that he was responsible for was not present, there was probably enough power.

Cries of shock rose outside the courtyard at the sight of the divine artifacts in the sky and the holy and blazing Qi that they rained down.

These cries were brimming with respect and yearning, and at their very core, a fervent piety.

The Demon Lord finally turned serious.

This was the Li Palace's grand array?

Who was presiding over it?

Chen Changsheng was present.

As the Pope, no one had more right than him to oversee the Li Palace's grand array.

His right hand was already gripping the hilt of his sword.

The world's sharpest sword, the Stainless Sword, did not leave its sheath.

What emerged were countless rays of pure white light.

These rays of light seeped out from between his fingers,

illuminating the stone steps in front of the courtyard's gate and those gradually blackening bloodstains.

A spherical white stone followed those four strands of divine Qi into the sky.

The white stone had been inlaid with an extremely complex array of black gold and was breathtakingly beautiful.

This was the Falling Star Stone.

After Daoist Baishi was killed in the Daoist church of Wenshui, this treasure of the Orthodoxy was kept with Chen Changsheng.

The Falling Star Stone flew up into the sky, unleashing a timeworn Qi as it began to suck in everything in its surroundings.

Wind and gravel were pulled towards it and even the laws of the world began to twist and deform.

A deep black hole appeared in the sky, the Falling Star Stone calmly floating within it.

The Mountain River Map, the Gloom Willow, and the other Orthodoxy treasures released a sacred Qi and began to rotate along the brim of the black hole, began to link together.

Countless dazzling and splendid golden rays of light descended like a curtain of water.

The entire courtyard was enveloped by the array, making it impossible for anyone to leave.

Chen Changsheng took his right hand off his hilt and gripped the Divine Staff, pointing at the figure deep within the courtyard.

An unimaginable amount of divine energy, containing a boundless radiance, smashed towards it like a massive wave.

Chapter 1021 – A Crane Brings a Storm to Shatter the Darkness

Wind preceded the descent of the fierce divine energy.

Howling gales stirred the sand in the courtyard, casting it in all directions, making the place seem like a wasteland.

The Demon Lord stood in the sandstorm, his eyes extremely dark, his face extremely pale.

Not out of fear, but because he had brought his blood to a boil in an extremely short amount of time, causing it to fiercely blaze.

An extremely cold and thick Qi surged out of his body and into the sky.

His black hair scattered behind him, dancing in the wind like thousands of snakes.

A faint light suffused his robes, heatless flames seemingly burning on their surface.

As the cold flames spread, Demon Breath rapidly occupied the center of the courtyard.

The clearest sign of this was the descent of darkness.

This darkness was frigidly cold and imbued with the Qi of gloom and extinction, representing a most bleak and cruel order.

That light energy, in contrast, was blazingly hot. It was not only holy, but also bursting with limitless vitality.

This courtyard neighboring the Xiang clan estate occupied a significant area, but in comparison to these two mighty Qis, it was not even worth mentioning.

In an instant, the courtyard was completely occupied by these two Qis.

One side was infinite darkness.

One side was infinite light.

And then they met.

Logically speaking, the meeting of these two opposite Qs should have led to the grandiose sight of the world collapsing.

But this did not happen. On the contrary, everything was quiet, even peaceful.

Even the fish in the stream at the base of the cliff outside the courtyard were unaffected.

Though the goats on the mountain slopes did look in confusion at the sky, wondering why both noon and midnight had simultaneously appeared.

These two Qis were the purest in the world.

This visible grandeur had its source in the most subtle and intrinsic of differences.

The true competition was taking place in the smallest of places, like a grain of sand or a wisp of wind.

For at least a short while, it would be hard to see any magnificent sight.

But this did not mean that there was a true peace.

The danger hidden in those tiny places would most likely lead to destruction the moment they were visible.

Chen Changsheng knew this, as did Linghai Zhiwang and the others, but they did not care, because it was evident that the strength of light currently had the advantage.

But they did not understand why the Demon Lord had chosen this method. Did he really think that his demon techniques alone were enough to contend against the Li Palace's grand array?

A crane cried.

The White Crane was an immortal bird and possessed an

extremely powerful spiritual sense. It sensed the dangers of the courtyard and took flight.

A zither strummed.

The blind zither player held his ancient zither. His toes gently pressed against the ground, and then he rushed several dozen zhang forward, his sleeves flying.

The notes of the zither suddenly went higher, a sound like ripping silk.

A crack appeared in the darkness shrouding half the courtyard.

The light Qi of the Li Palace array circled around the zither player's body.

From a distance, he looked like a celestial crane charging into the Netherworld.

He was no longer that passerby growing old in Wenshui City, nor was he that walking corpse with a heart of withered wood.

He was that Grand Elder of the Longevity Sect from one hundred years ago, of brilliant talent and profound cultivation.

The zither strummed once more.

Several dozen invisible waves flew out from his fingers, left the zither strings, and reverberated in all directions.

A tear had already been made at the edge of the darkness, and now these invisible zither notes were widening the gap.

The moment the darkness descended, the Demon Lord's body rapidly began to blur as if he was about to escape into the darkness.

Everyone was well aware that even with the Li Palace's grand array formed, once the Demon Lord entered the darkness, it would require a massive amount of energy to force him out.

Even more importantly, it would take more time.

No one knew who would end up winning between the White

Emperor and Madam Mu, and no one knew whether the winner would stop the Orthodoxy from killing the Demon Lord.

They had to do this as quickly as possible.

Of the human experts outside the courtyard, the blind zither player was unquestionably the strongest.

So his reaction was the fastest.

Where the zither notes fell, the darkness became slightly fainter, and the Demon Lord's blurry figure became somewhat clearer.

Several dozen extremely fine rays of light flashed across the Demon Lord's eyes.

These were the projections of the invisible zither notes on his mind.

And then, ten-some black dots appeared in his eyes.

These were the projections of pitch-black shields on his eyes.

Countless hacking and slicing sounds rang in the air.

Ten-some pitch-black shields swiftly revolved around the Demon Lord, leaving not a single gap.

The invisible zither notes and the attacks of the zither player that followed them were all blocked by these shields.

Several hundred dense spatial tears appeared on the shields, then vanished.

The flying yellow sands were painted black by the darkness and as they drifted toward the shields, they were sliced into even finer powder.

Several cries rose from outside the courtyard.

"The Seventeen Netherworld Armors!"

.....

.....

As the master of the continent's north, the Demon Lord naturally had certain things he could rely on, that he would dare to come to White Emperor City alone.

He might have carried many divine artifacts like the Seventeen Netherworld Armors on his person.

The blind zither player was not surprised. Surrounded by countless rays of light, he continued his attacks.

As he watched his opponent break through the darkness, the Demon Lord appeared unmoved. He stretched his hand out and removed a sword from the darkness.

This sword was pitch-black and seemed to lack any sort of edge, yet it seemed to absorb all light and vision.

There were no cries of surprise.

Those who recognized this sword were already too shocked to speak.

The Setting Sun Sword.

It was the previous Demon Lord's personal weapon.

This sword had met the Halving Blade and the Frost God Spear outside Luoyang.

Compared to this sword, Nanke's Southern Cross Sword was barely worth mentioning.

Compared to this sword, the Seventeen Netherworld Armors were completely lackluster.

.....

.....

The Setting Sun Sword slashed down.

All the darkness seemed to follow the Demon Lord's movements, descending several hundred zhang.

An unimaginable pressure descended upon the blind zither

player.

Chen Changsheng did not know if the zither player would be able to block the power of this famous demon sword, nor did he need to know.

When the Demon Lord slashed his sword, Chen Changsheng had used his own swords.

His right hand remained gripped on the Orthodoxy's Divine Staff, maintaining the Li Palace array to suppress the darkness and prevent the Demon Lord from escaping.

He did not need to hold the hilt of his sword, only needed to think for countless swords to emerge.

Around seven hundred swords howled as they shot out of the Vault Sheath, instantly crossing over a hundred zhang to assault the Demon Lord.

He wanted to kill the Demon Lord today, so he naturally used his strongest move.

Awe-inspiring sword intent filled the world, seeming to pierce through both light and darkness.

The seven hundred swords reflected light and linked together from end to end, pressing forward with indomitable fortitude.

In the Garden of Zhou, Chen Changsheng had once formed ten thousand swords into a dragon.

Later on, for a variety of reasons, he was no longer able to use such a powerful sword technique.

But today, this attack of his now had some of the might and feel of that dragon.

Countless metallic grinding sounds rose from the gloomy darkness.

Seven hundred sword intents, several times sharper than the zither player's zither notes, cut apart everything between the

heavens and earth.

Even the blind zither player had to retreat to the side for a moment to wait for that torrent of sword intents to finish their descent.

Shards flew in every direction, creating an uncountable number of deep and small holes in the ground.

The closest wall silently crumbled into pieces, the winds whisking away the last traces.

Both the sound and image were so strange that it made the hairs of onlookers stand on end.

After a moment, the storm of seven hundred swords came to a temporary halt.

The pitch-black armors around the Demon Lord were nowhere to be seen.

Just like that, the legendary demon artifact that was the Seventeen Netherworld Armors was destroyed.

Chapter 1022 – Right Before the Eyes, Millions of Lightyears Away

The seven-hundred-some swords had all once been renowned throughout the world.

Their former owners had all been exceptional experts who dared to venture into the land of demons.

In their eyes, what did the Netherworld matter?

The storm of swords began to attack once more.

This time, however, the swords no longer had such fierce energy and they seemed more focused.

The positions of the swords became more fixed, their connections tighter.

Because the moment they destroyed the Seventeen Netherworld Armors, the Setting Sun Sword in the Demon Lord's hand also slashed down.

The ten-some swords at the very front angrily shrieked as they were sent flying while several of their comrades wailed as they broke.

Besides his fight with the previous Demon Lord in the snowy mountains, this was the first time Chen Changsheng's swords had been broken since he had left the Garden of Zhou.

These swords were tightly intertwined with his spiritual sense, so his face paled as his mind felt the breaking of the swords.

As a result, he chose to adjust the energies of the swords, converting the storm of swords into the South Stream Temple sword array.

No matter how powerful the Setting Sun Sword was, it could not destroy this sword array, so where could the Demon Lord go?

.....

.....

The Demon Lord's expression did not change when he saw the Seventeen Netherworld Armors annihilated by the torrent of swords.

But when he saw the sword array in the sky, a hint of surprise finally appeared in his eyes.

On the observation platform, Chen Changsheng had relied on precisely this sword style to defeat him.

By now, he naturally knew that this was the legendary South Stream Temple sword array.

If he did not borrow a divine power that surpassed the mortal domain, the Demon Lord truly had no means of destroying this sword array.

But there was still no fear in his eyes.

The Setting Sun Sword descended, shattering the invisible zither notes, but it did not touch the storm of seven hundred swords in the air.

The Demon Lord's attack was not aimed at Chen Changsheng, nor was it aimed at the South Stream Temple sword array.

From the very start, he had no intention of facing off against Chen Changsheng, and certainly not competing in swords.

Even someone as proud as him did not have the confidence to compete in swords with Chen Changsheng.

The swords that had been jolted away or broken had only been defeated by the Setting Sun Sword because they had used much of their strength to break the Netherworld Armors.

In truth, his sword was slashing at the ground.

The Setting Sun Sword struck the ground.

A setting sun sank into the horizon.

The dark night descended.

He had painted the ground to bring down the night.

The Demon Lord's figure retreated into the darkness.

.....

.....

When the setting sun sank into the Western Sea, darkness would envelop the entire continent. But the current darkness was not real and it could not even occupy the entirety of the courtyard. Under the assault of the light from the Li Palace's grand array, it was continuously retracting.

Chen Changsheng knew that the Demon Lord had not left, but retreated deep into the darkness.

But he did not pursue, as he needed to oversee the array, but also because he felt a very profound sense of danger.

The blind zither player also did not pursue, but he thought differently from Chen Changsheng.

His withered fingers touched the zither strings, making them buzz.

The zither note was a message.

His and Chen Changsheng's attacks had succeeded in delaying the Demon Lord for a few moments.

Perhaps it was just the blink of an eye, but it was enough for the cosmetic-buying girl and the others to react.

Pink and white powder was liberally spread over the courtyard.

The fortune-tellers and peddlers stood in the middle of the powder, using it as a screen while they used their coins and sand table to calculate.

The six government laborers took the chains from their

shoulders and threw them into the courtyard.

The darkness clearly had no form or substance, but as the chains passed through it and pulled on the darkness, it gradually grew taut, seeming to become an actual black cloth.

The two sesame-candy-selling elders rolled up the fronts of their robes, somberly took a step forward, bent their knees, and let out a straight punch!

In Fivekind Man, these two elders were the most subdued and low-key, but their techniques were the most profound.

They were descendants of the Imperial clan and they cultivated the traditional techniques of the Blazing Sun Style, so their techniques had the most destructive effect against the demon techniques!

With two explosions, burning rays of lights burst out from two steady and royal fists.

Two deep impressions appeared on the taut cloth of darkness.

The air shrieked.

This was the sound of space twisting, on the verge of breaking.

As was expected of the Wenshui Tang clan's experts, their combined strength was even enough to tear open the Demon Lord's darkness!

.....

.....

Before the light of the Li Palace's grand array, the darkness in the courtyard receded, but it could not escape and now seemed on the verge of collapse.

The Wenshui Tang clan's experts were already in the courtyard.

Chen Changsheng's swords also moved, entering the darkness.

Suddenly, he heard the clattering of metal on stone.

This sound came from one of the swords at the very front.

He sensed an unimaginable power and an object so hard that it did not seem to come from this world.

An intense wariness appeared in his eyes.

He had already made preparations beforehand, and the Demon Lord's words just now had put him on the highest alert.

But he had not expected his opponent to appear so suddenly and without warning.

The Wenshui Tang clan's experts were about to enter the darkness.

Especially the two sesame-candy-selling elders.

"Back!"

The blind zither player heard Chen Changsheng's shout.

He did not understand why they had to retreat right when they were about to tear apart the darkness and successfully kill the Demon Lord.

But he knew that something must have happened, so he immediately transformed into a wisp of smoke and retreated.

The two sesame-candy-selling elders also heard Chen Changsheng's shout, but it was already too late for them to retreat.

In the original plan, their Blazing Sun Style was the most important method for killing the Demon Lord, so they were closest to the darkness.

A terrifying strength flooded toward them, swallowed up the burning rays of light from their fists and went on to attack their bodies.

This strength was so pure and terrifying that it seemed to come from the Divine Kingdom, even robbing them of any courage to resist.

Immediately after calling for retreat, Chen Changsheng charged forward.

He used the true meaning of the Blazing Sword to activate the Yeshi Step. He moved as fast as a lightning bolt and instantly arrived in front of the darkness.

When that flood of power was about to crash onto those two elders, his sword array had already come down.

Amidst the shrill cry of countless swords, he grabbed the two elders by the shoulders and swiftly retreated.

The invisible, yet terrifying strength began to encroach on every part of the courtyard. Even the smallest speck of dust gained the weight of a mountain.

In the swift retreat, the two elders vomited blood, soaking their robes.

Chen Changsheng landed, his body swaying, his face even paler.

With just a single exchange, without even seeing the opponent, the Tang clan experts had been dealt severe injuries.

Even Chen Changsheng's sea of consciousness had been severely shaken.

The shrill sword cries suddenly ceased as the storm of swords flew back to take up their positions around Chen Changsheng.

The attentive observer might notice that of the seven-hundred-some swords, several dozen had been broken.

The hundred-some swords at the very front were shuddering at high speeds, appearing both furious and confused.

Just what was that thing in the darkness?

.....

.....

Deep within the darkness, a point of light appeared.

It was not a particularly bright point of light, even appearing somewhat dim, but everyone was stunned by it.

Everyone could sense that though this point of light seemed right in front of them, it was actually millions of li away.

If a point of light was visible from millions of li away, how bright would it be when it was right before the eyes?

While they thought of this question, the point of light was rapidly filling their vision, exploding with endless light.

This light was real, burning, blinding. Even the light of the Li Palace's grand array seemed to dim in the face of this light!

A few priests from the Daoist Church of the Western Wastes covered their eyes and howled in pain. They collapsed on the ground and began to roll.

Chapter 1023 – Sacred Light Shines over the Black Sea

Even the eyes of Linghai Zhiwang and the other Prefects ached somewhat. They needed several moments to adapt to the light before they could look at the darkness in the courtyard.

The point of light in the darkness had grown much larger, now deserving to be called a ball of light. However, it was still difficult to clearly make out, as if the darkness had masked it with a thin layer of gauze.

A figure appeared in the ball of light. One could faintly see that it was naked and that a pair of white wings was growing from its back.

The blinding light came from this figure, spreading out in all directions.

Light and darkness were two absolute contradictory strengths, but strangely, this light did not harm the darkness.

On the contrary, the darkness seemed to be taking strength from this light, allowing it to thicken until it almost seemed to be real.

The strong winds coming down from the sky caused the darkness to roil, making it look like the inky sea right before a hurricane.

A grand and divine strength, different from the divine strength of the Orthodoxy, appeared.

Everyone sensed incredible danger, and the four treasures of the Li Palace were the first to sense the hostility in this power. They instantly began to release more divine Qi that descended into the courtyard. However, not only was it not able to extinguish that ball of light, it could not even slow its expansion.

As the priests saw the ball of light get larger and larger, and the figure inside get clearer and clearer, they became absolutely

astonished.

Just what was this figure? How could not even the grand array of the Li Palace be able to suppress it?

.....

.....

Neither the priests nor the Tang clan's Fivekind Man knew what the thing inside the darkness was.

But some people already knew the story of the battle between the Divine several days ago.

Was this an Angel of the Sacred Light?

Chen Changsheng looked at that figure in the ball of light and silently thought.

The thick darkness was like layer after layer of mist, preventing even him from clearly making out what was inside.

But he could see the pure white wings behind the figure, could sense that apathetic and majestic Qi exuded by the figure.

The Demon Lord had already retreated deep into the darkness, making it impossible to find any trace of him.

Chen Changsheng was somewhat puzzled by a few things.

This courtyard had always been under strict observation, and no expert's Qi had ever appeared.

With the Li Palace's grand array suppressing the courtyard, not even a Divine Domain expert could silently arrive on the scene.

How had the Demon Lord summoned this Angel of the Sacred Light? Where had this Angel been hiding?

There was a clear whistle.

It was Linghai Zhiwang.

The crystal core that seemed like the source of raging fire floated

out from the depths of his eyes and silently floated between his eyes.

Archbishop An Lin closed her eyes and began to recite a Daoist scripture. Her gentle and steady voice circled around the courtyard. Those shocked priests gathered their courage and began to recite scriptures with her. They gradually calmed down, the pious and dignified air diluting the panic.

As the volume of their recitations increased, the Mountain River Map in the sky unrolled, its Qi growing more and more powerful.

Hu Thirty-Two stretched his arm into the air and grabbed one end of the Gloom Willow. Silently circulating his true essence, he lashed at the darkness.

Daoist Siyuan reached one hand into the air to grip the Universe Stamp while he used his left hand to receive the Falling Star Stone Chen Changsheng had sent to him with his spiritual sense, and then he attempted to stabilize the array.

These four Prefects of the Orthodoxy also knew the story of the battle between the Divine, so they had already mentally prepared themselves.

If they had just wanted to kill the Demon Lord, then the Li Palace's grand array, Chen Changsheng, and the Tang clan's Fivekind Man were enough.

Their earlier wariness and solemn expressions was because they knew that they might encounter an enemy today that was beyond the imaginations of humanity.

But they would not give up. Just like Chen Changsheng had said, if this really did happen, they still wanted to kill the Demon Lord.

It was just that before they killed the Demon Lord, they first had to kill that seemingly perfect existence in the darkness.

Because it was also as Chen Changsheng said.

One who comes from afar is a guest, and the earlier one dies, the earlier one can go home.

The 'guest' in this statement naturally referred to this Angel of the Sacred Light who still had not revealed its true appearance.

The Sacred Light Continent truly was very far, so this person had to die first.

.....

.....

Star Core.

Gloom Willow.

Mountain River Map.

Universe Stamp.

Falling Star Stone.

Five of the Li Palace's treasures released their most powerful Qis.

The Li Palace array was stabilized, its warm light reaching out to the darkness, suppressing that roiling sea of black.

As the darkness was stymied, the indistinct ball of light somewhat dimmed, the figure of the Angel within also growing fuzzy.

That Angel of the Sacred Light sensed the powerful pressure coming in from all sides and let out a furious roar.

This thunderous roar was bursting with anger and the will to fight, the desire to kill.

Its anger was because these lower-level beings dared to challenge its majesty.

The will to fight was because this array truly was very powerful, and it should have been even more powerful.

The desire to kill was because this was its nature.

It governed war, and Bie Yanghong had named it Anger's Flame.

From that day, it took this name as its holy name on this continent.

The thunderous roar exploded in everyone's ears and hearts, and also exploded in the actual world.

A hole was torn open in the darkness, and the western wall of the courtyard was shaken into powder.

The light from the Angel became actual flames that raged on the yellow sands of the courtyard.

Every visible spark, every perceivable wave of heat, contained a terrifying power.

Several dozen warriors who had rushed from the Xiang clan's estate to save Xiang Qiu were unfortunate enough to meet this power.

There were several dozen squelches, and several dozen sturdy demi-human bodies were rendered into balls of flesh.

The Li Palace priests were frequently in contact with the pressure and energy of divine might, and they also had the protection of the Li Palace array, so the injuries they suffered were not too heavy.

The thunderous roar did not stop here. It continued to ram against the Li Palace's grand array like the waves of the sea beating against the rocks, forever and unending.

The ground began to quake more and more.

The blood on the streets, the howling winds outside the array, and the quaking of the ground caused the priests to silently tremble, their faces pale.

Chen Changsheng gazed at the Angel in the mist. As he sensed the power and pressure in the light and sound, his expression became focused.

This Angel was more terrifying than he had imagined, than Bie

Yanghong had described.

If one were to describe it in the cultivation system of the continent, this Angel was on the verge of reaching the peak of the Saint Realm.

Would the Li Palace's grand array be able to suppress it?

Chapter 1024 – The Stone Sculpture Opens Its Eyes

Chen Changsheng could clearly see that the pressure exerted by the Angel of Sacred Light in the darkness was incredibly powerful. Even amongst the former Storms of the Eight Directions, only the Elder of Heavenly Secrets or Bie Yanghong would have been able to resist it.

No one could determine whether the Li Palace's grand array could suppress this person, or for how long it could suppress this person.

The current Li Palace array was not complete. Mao Qiuyu was still in the capital.

Even more importantly, based on Bie Yanghong's recount, two Angels had appeared that day with Black Robe.

Since one Angel had appeared, the other certainly had the ability to appear as well, but where was it?

This was what concerned Chen Changsheng the most.

It was clear that the appearance of these two Angels of the Sacred Light was related to the Demon Lord.

In a very short moment of time, he made a decision.

While one Angel was still unable to break out of the Li Palace's grand array and the other Angel had not appeared, they had to kill the Demon Lord.

This meant entering the darkness in the courtyard, adventuring into its depths.

At the same time, he still needed to preside over the Li Palace array to both suppress this angel and ensure that the Demon Lord could not leave.

What should be done?

"Don't let it out."

He placed the Divine Staff in Tang Thirty-Six's hand.

Somewhat disbelieving, Tang Thirty-Six asked, "Me again?"

There was no meaning to this question. There was no one else present that could temporarily serve as the array pivot.

To put it another way, the only hands the Divine Staff was willing to be held by, besides Chen Changsheng's, were Tang Thirty-Six's.

Who had made it so that he was the one to receive the Divine Staff when the previous Pope was bestowing it?

Although Tang Thirty-Six appeared very angry, his two words like a groan of pain, he did not refuse.

Because he knew that he could not refuse.

He took a step forward and raised the Divine Staff.

The expensive leather boot from Tianliang County made a deep crack in the ground as it stepped on the cobblestones. The Divine Staff in his hand exploded with light, causing the Falling Star Stone and the other treasures to unleash an even more terrifying pressure that surged toward that Angel in the darkness.

Tang Thirty-Six's complexion instantly paled, but his eyes shone with determination.

Chen Changsheng did not see this sight. Before Tang Thirty-Six had taken the step forward, he had already vanished into the darkness.

The divine might of the Li Palace's grand array cut off the courtyard from the world, suppressed the darkness and that other world, but it had no effect on him.

The darkness was so thick that it obscured all vision, but it could

not slow him in the slightest.

His spiritual sense was as serene as water. It could light up the most distant star in the night sky, so it naturally could pierce through this darkness before him.

But the Demon Lord had already retreated very deep into the darkness, fusing with it. It would take some time to find him.

Right now, what he lacked most was time.

Fortunately, he was not alone.

When he was passing the Divine Staff to Tang Thirty-Six, that person had already entered the darkness.

More accurately, that person had never retreated from the darkness in the first place.

The biting strum of a zither had impassively struck into the darkness.

The blind zither player truly did have an unfathomable cultivation level and most sturdy mental fortitude. Even the descent of an Angel of Sacred Light was not able to make him waver.

Chen Changsheng heard the note from the zither and his eyes moved, his storm of swords following.

The darkness was torn apart by intimidating sword intents and biting zither notes, revealing a path.

At the end of this path was a tree.

The Demon Lord drifted backward, his two hands laying down barrier after barrier as he retreated.

Sword intent and zither note pursued, shattering those barriers as if they were made of glass.

Countless shattering sounds could be heard as the Demon Lord landed on the ground with countless tears hacked out of his

midnight-black robe.

Golden blood could be seen seeping out of those tears.

The howling wind suddenly stopped for a few moments.

Chen Changsheng and the blind zither player appeared.

Zither notes lingered while the storm of swords formed an array.

The tree was suddenly no more.

It had not truly become nothing, only been rendered into the finest powder by zither notes and sword intents.

This powder was so fine that not even the wind could blow it away, so it was naturally impossible to see.

Chen Changsheng and the zither player did not continue their attack, because they felt an ill foreboding.

The Demon Lord had stopped his retreat.

He stood where the tree had once stood, stood in his own darkness. He calmly regarded Chen Changsheng and the blind zither player.

It was like he was viewing two superb works of art, praising their perfection.

The works of art in Xuelao City had always tended toward ostentatious and opulent, but at their core, one would always find the ice-cold aura of death.

The finest work of art was death itself.

In the Demon Lord's eyes, Chen Changsheng and the blind zither player were two lifeless corpses.

.....

.....

Chen Changsheng and the zither player began to sense more and more danger.

Where was the Demon Lord's confidence coming from? Where was that indistinct sense of danger hiding?

Was it from that misty ball of light in the night sky?

No, the Angel in that ball of light was still incapable of breaking out of the Li Palace's grand array for the time being.

There was still another Angel.

Chen Changsheng had already prepared himself for this.

The string of stone pearls had at some point moved from his wrist into his palm.

He gripped the chilly stone pearls and silently observed the surrounding darkness.

Only by confirming his opponent's position could he launch his strongest attack at this expert from another continent.

He was confident that even if he could not kill or heavily injure the Angel, he could make things incredibly troublesome for it.

Because his sea of consciousness contained the battle experience and wisdom passed down by Senior Bie Yanghong.

Because he had the Heavenly Tome Monoliths.

At that moment, he was confident that the blind zither player would seize the chance and kill the Demon Lord in a flurry of zither notes.

But he now realized that his arrangements were apparently set for failure.

As was said before, his spiritual sense was as serene as water. It could light up the most distant star in the night sky, could disregard the thickest darkness.

But he could not pin down the location of that Angel.

The courtyard in the darkness was still and quiet.

Both the stalemate between the Li Palace array and the other

Angel, and the Demon Lord right in front of him, seemed like they were in another world.

Chen Changsheng looked at the Demon Lord, his expression still, but his palms already somewhat sweaty.

The five Heavenly Tome Monoliths became somewhat slippery from the sweat. It was an extremely uncomfortable feeling and only deepened his apprehension.

The situation before him had already become flowing sand, impossible to grasp.

The response from his scattered spiritual sense and the zither notes were all telling him something.

The Angel of the Sacred Light was not in this darkness, was not in this courtyard, and might not even be on this continent.

So why did he still feel that danger, and why was it getting worse and worse?

The Angel that was now contending with the Li Palace array had appeared without warning.

Was the same thing about to happen?

.....

.....

In truth, only a few moments had passed since the tree had disappeared.

Chen Changsheng and the blind zither player had already scoured the darkness with their sword intents and zither notes several times.

They had failed to notice that to the side of the courtyard's rear gate was a stone sculpture.

Even in the heavy darkness, this stone sculpture was very conspicuous. If they had turned around, they would have

undoubtedly seen it.

It was a statue of a naked person, half-crouched, two wings sprouting from its back.

It looked rather similar to the Angel in the ball of light.

In truth, this naked stone sculpture had always been an Angel.

Chen Changsheng and the zither player had failed to sense this stone statue because it really did seem like an actual stone statue.

This stone sculpture had no Qi, did not breathe, had no vitality or heat, and it certainly did not move.

In other words, this stone sculpture was a lifeless object.

No matter how one examined it, whether with spiritual sense, or sword intent, or zither note, one would reach this conclusion.

Suddenly, the stone sculpture opened its eyes.

It came to life.

Chapter 1025 – Trying One's Sword (I)

A tree had once stood where the Demon Lord was standing.

The tree was now void, sliced into the finest powder by Chen Changsheng's sword intents and the blind zither player's zither notes.

The moment the zither notes and sword intents descended, a green leaf on the highest and thinnest branch of the tree was blown away by the wind.

This green leaf fell on the tightly-shut eyes of the stone sculpture next to the rear gate of the courtyard.

Neither Chen Changsheng nor the blind zither player noticed this stone statue, so it naturally followed that they did not notice when the stone statue opened its eyes.

But when the stone statue opened its eyes, the green leaf was flicked away to gently drift back into the wind.

The blind zither player's ears vibrated. With a flip of his hands, he bared the ancient zither in front of him. He stimulated his true essence and pushed Chen Changsheng away.

There was no sound, only an abrupt flash of light in the darkness.

This light was a thin line of light, like a needle.

This needle of light traveled so fast that it seemed like actual light. A moment ago it was in the depths of the darkness, and now it was right in front of the pair.

Puff.

The thin needle of light easily stabbed through the ancient zither, penetrated the zither player's left arm, and then silently vanished in the darkness.

The blind zither player's face became a ghastly white as blood gushed out. His hands shuddered as they held the zither, seemingly

about to lose their hold.

The slender needle of light had only left a tiny puncture mark, but it had apparently inflicted terrible wounds.

Seven hundred swords howled as they returned, shielding Chen Changsheng and the blind zither player.

The swords pointed their tips outward, making them look like a fruit growing countless thorns.

This was the most defensive form of the South Stream Temple sword array.

The blind zither player's mind was slightly eased, and he could no longer endure the pain. With a grunt, he put down the ancient zither.

The slender needle of light had only pierced through his left arm, but the strange and holy Qi attached to it was continuously gnawing away at his meridians.

Even with the blind zither player's cultivation level, only half a step from the Divine, even if he used all his true essence, his spiritual sense still could not expel that Qi.

What sort of Qi was this? Just what was that needle of light?

The eyes of Chen Changsheng and the blind zither player looked past the storm of swords and fell on that stone sculpture.

The stone sculpture's eyes were open and it was now standing.

Its eyes held an extreme apathy. It was a void of emotion, with neither love nor hatred. There was only ice, as if this was not a living being.

But the powerful Qi in the depths of its eyes was so real and alive.

If one looked even deeper into its eyes, perhaps one would see a pure intelligence. Those were the laws of the world.

Without question, this stone statue was an actual living being.

But it was completely different from any living being that had ever appeared on the continent, both in its method of existence and its source.

The blind zither player could not see its naked and perfect body, nor its pair of sacred white wings.

But he could clearly sense its existence.

His face paled even more.

The stone statue slowly raised its right hand.

In the gloomy confines of the darkness, even Chen Changsheng could only rely on his spiritual sense to observe the surroundings.

But when the stone statue raised its right hand, it managed to take from that deepest darkness those slivers of light hidden in spatial cracks.

Those rays of light congregated in its hands, gradually bundling together and taking shape.

This was a spear made of condensed light.

The blind zither player inclined his ears in that direction. He heard the sound of space being pierced by that light, being annihilated, but his face did not further pale.

He was no longer thinking, so there was no need to be wary or uneasy.

He took the zither in his trembling hands and whispered to Chen Changsheng, "Go."

He had not even been able to counter that needle of light, and now they were facing a spear of light!

Chen Changsheng understood the zither player's intentions.

The blind zither player intended to use his own life to block the light spear and a possible attack from the Demon Lord so that Chen Changsheng could retreat from the darkness.

As long as Chen Changsheng was able to retreat into the courtyard, he could enter the center of the Li Palace's grand array.

Even if they could not defeat these two peerless powers from the other continent, they could at least buy a chance to live, or more time.

Chen Changsheng did not accept the blind zither player's request.

At this moment, even more time would not offer a better chance at survival.

And he would not let the blind zither player remain here alone.

He had already made his preparations.

He knew that when they attacked the Demon Lord, there was a high chance that they would encounter the second Angel of Sacred Light.

This was the living stone sculpture.

According to Bie Yanghong's account, this Angel governed judgment, and its holy name was Hidden Thunder. It was even more terrifying than the Angel contending against the Li Palace's grand array.

Chen Changsheng unsheathed the Stainless Sword and fixed its hilt into the sheath, then used both hands to grip the hilt.

With this action, he also hung the string of stone pearls in his palm onto the hilt.

.....

.....

In the distance, the Demon Lord slightly perked his brows at this sight.

He naturally knew what it meant.

At this point, the entire continent knew that when Chen Changsheng put his dagger and sheath together, it would become a

longsword of sorts.

This would only happen when Chen Changsheng was putting his life on the line.

The problem was that Chen Changsheng should have known who he was facing.

The Demon Lord knew that Chen Changsheng knew, so he did not know why Chen Changsheng had come to kill, or why he insisted on staying instead of retreating.

Did he really think that he could terminate this powerful being from the other continent?

Did he really think that in this hopeless situation, putting his life on the line would be of any use?

Chen Changsheng had a very calm expression. There was no sign of passion or impulse.

There was no atmosphere of tragedy in this night-shrouded courtyard.

He was well aware of the horrors of this Angel of the Sacred Light.

And for some reason, these two Angels were even more powerful than when Bie Yanghong had seen them.

But he still wanted to try.

Just like Wang Po did in that storm in Xunyang City, as he confronted the moonlight manifested by Zhu Luo's sword.

.....

.....

The Angel's gaze was indifferent.

It treated that storm of seven hundred swords with the gaze of indifference.

Its gaze fell on Chen Changsheng.

Its eyes gradually began to change.

Crueler and crueler, harsher and harsher, scarier and scarier.

But even more shocking was that these were all emotions.

This was incredibly rare.

Just what had this Angel seen on Chen Changsheng?

Or was it that it had sensed something in Chen Changsheng's body?

Extremely archaic and strange syllables emerged from the Angel's lips.

It was like peals of thunder in the sky.

When he heard this voice, the Demon Lord's complexion became rather strange.

So did Chen Changsheng's.

The laws of the world did not need to translate.

He vaguely understood the Angel's meaning.

Chapter 1026 – Trying One's Sword (II)

Bie Yanghong had once passed all he experienced in the battle between the Divine into Chen Changsheng's mind.

The language of the Sacred Light Continent was somewhat similar to Dragon language.

When he was a child and memorizing the final book of the Daoist Canon in Xining's old temple, he had learned from his master how those words should be pronounced.

In the cavern beneath New North Bridge, he had spent a very long time learning Dragon language from the little Black Dragon.

The Demon Lord could understand the words of the Angel of Sacred Light, and Chen Changsheng could also understand a little.

Although the meaning was not terribly precise, he did know that the Angel was not calling him a stealer of fire.

The meaning of those syllables was something like 'descendant of light', or 'inheritor of light'.

But what did this mean?

Chen Changsheng did not understand.

The change in the Angel's eyes, the appearance of cruelty, harshness, and terror, did not arise from the Angel's stance to Chen Changsheng, but from a sort of vigilance.

Suddenly, the Angel appeared outside the storm of swords.

There was no sound, no action. Without even moving, it seemed to have left its original place.

The sheer bizarreness of the sight could make one tremble in fear. It was like the Angel could completely disregard the highest laws of the world.

The Angel gazed at Chen Changsheng in the storm of swords and

raised the spear of light.

Chen Changsheng stood in front of the blind zither player.

The blind zither player knew what he wanted to do.

The wind brushed against his white hair.

His fingers touched the strings of his zither.

Biting and mournful notes rose from the zither, bursting with extreme reluctance.

If he had not been ambushed by his sect master, he probably would have been in the Divine Domain by now. Even if he were still no match for this Angel of the Sacred Light, it would still have been enough for a proper fight.

Truly reluctant!

But... so what!

The zither notes suddenly increased in pitch, all the reluctance transforming into a will to fight that slashed at the Angel!

Agitated by the zither notes, the swords in the sky began to buzz, vibrating so fast that they became impossible to clearly make out.

The howling winter winds stirred the yellow sands, but they were not able to make it one foot off the ground.

The area above this one foot of space was filled with zither notes and sword intents.

The blind zither player was burning all his true essence to unleash his strongest attack.

The array energy of the South Stream Temple sword array was also being pushed to its maximum output.

The Angel did not care, much less attempt to dodge. It simply stood there, calmly observing Chen Changsheng.

The zither notes and sword intents disappeared.

Chen Changsheng and the blind zither player had been staring at the Angel the entire time, so they knew that it had done nothing.

Even if this Angel had a divine body of unimaginable perfection, how could their attacks not leave even a single blemish?

Could the sword intents and zither notes that filled the sky have possibly missed?

How was this possible?

Chen Changsheng suddenly noticed a streak of light in the darkness.

This was an extremely faint light, like the embers of a bonfire that had been burning for an entire night.

But this streak of light was exceptionally clear. It clearly followed some sort of order, traveled in some sort of direction.

He thought of a possibility and his expression flickered.

Could it possibly be that the moment those sword intents and zither notes struck, the Angel retreated into the darkness and then came back?

It was like what had happened at the rear gate just a few moments ago.

If this expert from another world truly was so fast, how could it be defeated?

.....

.....

The Angel calmly looked at Chen Changsheng in the sword array, its eyes changing once more.

This change was very slow, yet it had a grand momentum, like the seas transforming into mulberry fields, the sea of stars into a grave of light.

The harshness, the cruelty, and the terror once more

transformed into indifference, but this indifference was now tinged with a few indistinct things.

Chen Changsheng felt a chill run through his body when he saw the eyes of the Angel.

It was not fear, but the effect that a fear from many years ago had left on his heart.

When he was ten, the lonely mountain in the Cloud Grave had exploded with the mad howls of many monsters.

While his senior brother Yu Ren was fanning Chen Changsheng by the bed, he would occasionally turn to look at that distant mountain.

Chen Changsheng remembered very clearly that whenever his senior brother turned his head, his eyes would have this same emotion.

The Angel raised the spear of light and stabbed it into the storm of swords.

The swords naturally responded, the sword array flowing like a cloud to tightly lock down the entire world.

There was a boom, and all the sand on the ground jumped up at once, breaking past that one-foot line.

It looked like the ground of the courtyard had been raised by one foot.

And also like Chen Changsheng and the blind zither player had sunk one foot into the ground.

What was beneath the ground? The abyss, or the prison of gods?

The fierce gales blew toward them and were sliced into wisps by zither notes.

The blind zither player lowered his head, his hands flying across the strings. The wound on his left shoulder burst open, sending blood flying as well.

Chen Changsheng's spiritual sense was connected to the sword array, so he instantly paled.

The spear of light stopped outside the storm of swords.

But in the very next moment, a sharp and bright spear point probed out of the void, deep within the storm of swords!

Only when he saw that bright spear point before his eyes did Chen Changsheng realize that his South Stream Temple sword array simply could not truly block this Angel's attacks!

Snap!

The strings of the zither snapped, curling up like the whiskers of a dragon and tightly wrapping around this spear point!

All of the blind zither player's fingers were instantly ruptured by the terrifying strength in these strings, sending blood splashing everywhere.

Chen Changsheng raised his sword and held it horizontally in front of him.

There was a clap as the middle of the Vault Sheath blocked the spear.

There was an ear-aching screech.

It was not the screech of the spear against the Vault Sheath.

It was the sound of bones incessantly trembling in his body.

There seemed nothing special about this spear point probing out of the darkness besides its brightness.

But Chen Changsheng and the blind zither player were able to sense the weight placed upon it.

This weight could not be described with mountains.

This weight was the world.

This was the might of the world.

Could humans endure it?

Chen Changsheng had a stainless constitution and had been bathed in the true blood of a dragon. A body with this level of toughness would be hard to find, even if one scoured the world.

But he found it impossible to endure the power transmitted by this spear point. He neared collapse, neared his death.

The swords were connected to his mind, so they sensed the danger he faced, yet they could offer no aid.

They were blocking the spear of light in the Angel's hands and the pressure they endured was even greater.

The storm was slightly disordered.

The South Stream Temple sword array was also slightly disordered.

If not for the fact that the Angel seemed wary of some of Chen Changsheng's moves, perhaps the sword array would have already been pierced through by the tyrannical spear.

Even so, Chen Changsheng and the zither player were already at their breaking point.

The Demon Lord quietly watched all of this play out. He did not act according to the style of Xuelao City and lightly say, 'Farewell forever, Your Holiness', because he knew that Chen Changsheng still had cards left to play.

It could be the Garden of Zhou, the Green Leaf World, or perhaps something else.

Until those cards were thoroughly exhausted, he would not believe that Chen Changsheng could die.

Chapter 1027 – The Great Light Comes

Chen Changsheng did not enter the Green Leaf World, nor did he enter the Garden of Zhou.

He could not be sure that the Angel was like the previous Demon Lord and able to see through spatial laws.

He would not make this choice, not until the final moment.

So against this current peril, what would he do?

He did something surprising.

He closed his eyes.

This was not disdain.

It was also not surrender.

It only symbolized focus, that he was attempting to find a way to break out of this situation.

The Angel was standing outside the storm of swords, its hand holding a spear of light and stabbing it toward him.

He knew that this was not what was really going on.

In this period, in that sight that he could not be at all sure was real, that Angel had been moving the entire time.

A moment ago, it was in the deepest part of the darkness, and in the next moment, it was at the weakest point of the sword array, and then it returned to its original position.

In this extremely brief span of time, the Angel had launched countless attacks against the sword array.

It was just that it was too fast, like a lightless thunderbolt. With just one's eyes, it was simply impossible to sense that it was moving.

Chen Changsheng's eyes also could not keep up with its speed. He could only rely on his sword array to defend and sense.

In these circumstances, it was simply impossible for him to confirm the Angel's position.

So the strategy he had prepared for the Angel, those Heavenly Tome Monoliths transformed into stone pearls, naturally would not be able to touch the Angel.

This being the case, he might as well close his eyes. He would cease to chase after the Angel's tracks with his eyes, choosing instead to spread his spiritual sense.

The spiritual sense spreading through the darkness was just like a net.

He still found it impossible to confirm the Angel's position, but he could now clearly sense the traces left behind as the Angel moved through the net.

Those straight and randomly turning rays of light were dazzling to behold.

Chen Changsheng's eyes were closed, his head was lowered, and his hands gripped his sword. He waited for a pattern to gradually appear in those tracks, or for them to slow.

The blind zither player guessed at what he was doing. He slightly tilted his head, and with a shake of his blood-drenched fingers, the snapped zither strings drifted out of the sword array. Like slender snakes, they attempted to seize those rays of light, to slow the movements of that Angel.

Alas, a vast gap of cultivation existed between the two.

The Angel apathetically stood outside the storm of swords, countless flickers of light flaring and extinguishing around it.

No matter how serene and formidable Chen Changsheng's spiritual sense was, he still would not be able to truly bind it.

And the zither strings would never be able to chase its figure down.

When it was fighting, it was true light and lightning.

Its spear of light, holding limitless power, incessantly stabbed at the South Stream Temple sword array.

The swords began to whistle and howl while Chen Changsheng gradually paled. The shaking of his sea of consciousness had already inflicted significant internal injuries on him.

But he still did not give up, because it was evident that each spear thrust had much less power behind it.

The decrease in strength was because the Angel wanted to push its speed to the limit.

The Angel of the Sacred Light had chosen to be very cautious.

Caution was out of vigilance.

This meant that Chen Changsheng's response was reasonable.

But it was still a great pity.

This pity was for the same reason as earlier.

The gap in cultivation levels was too great.

Hundreds of rays of lights flickered in and out of the darkness, like the twinkling of stars obscured by a thin layer of clouds.

In this brief span of time, the spear of light in the Angel's hand had attacked the storm of swords more than four hundred times.

At the same time, that spear point that had passed through space and was now blocked by Chen Changsheng's sword was now only half a foot from his eyes.

Countless swords were knocked away as they let out helpless cries of anger and reluctance.

The spear of light seemed to be proceeding slowly and unstoppably into the heart of the storm of swords.

It was like a great river cleaving through a mountain.

A dazzling light bursting out of the clouds.

The South Stream Temple sword array was about to break.

Chen Changsheng and the blind zither player were about to die.

.....

.....

Suddenly.

An even more dazzling light appeared in the darkness.

It was a flame from a primordial era that seemed capable of burning everything.

Even the darkness and the light of the Angel could serve as its fuel.

Soon after, a sword glow like a celestial river appeared in everyone's eyes.

If the Angel's spear of light was a great river cleaving through a mountain...

This sword glow was a celestial river shattering the sky as it descended.

The calm surface of its waters reflected golden flames, shone with countless bright and blinding rays of light.

Countless sparks appeared in the night sky and dropped to the ground.

Careful observation would reveal that these sparks came together into a straight line.

A battle was currently taking place at speeds beyond the ability of the human eye to see.

Those sparks were the traces left by this battle.

.....

.....

The Angel vanished from the perimeter of the storm of swords.

The spear point in front of Chen Changsheng also disappeared.

The innumerable sparks in the darkness were like fireworks, a beautiful and soul-stirring sight.

But what truly stirred the soul was that this was proof that the Angel's true position had been figured out, forcing it to engage in battle.

Who did that sword glow of boundless light belong to?

What sort of flame could even burn the darkness?

Just who on this continent had a speed that could match an Angel of the Sacred Light?

Chen Changsheng did not need to analyze these questions.

In truth, the moment he sensed that light, he knew the answer to all of them.

That light was too bright, so bright that even the figure of the Angel seemed dim in comparison, and that spear of light seemed nothing more than an iron rod.

There was only one sword style in the world that could release such great light.

And Chen Changsheng was the only person in the world that had truly faced this sword style.

It was the strongest sword style of South Stream Temple, perhaps even the entire continent.

The Sword of Great Light.

.....

.....

The only person that could use the Sword of Great Light was Xu Yourong.

And only she had speed comparable to this Angel, and only the true flames of the Heavenly Phoenix could burn darkness.

Of the experts beneath the Divine Domain, only she could make the Angel of Sacred Light reveal its true self.

Xiaode would not be able to do it, nor would Xiao Zhang, Liang Wangsun, or the blind zither player.

From this aspect, Xu Yourong truly lived up to the name of the Heavenly Phoenix.

Her appearance made the situation abruptly change, but it was still not enough to alter the final conclusion.

The Sword of Great Light was truly powerful to an absurd level, but it still could not surmount that gap in cultivation.

Not everyone could be like Wang Po, spending a couple of weeks under a ginkgo tree comprehending the blade and then cleaving open the heavens and earth with one slash of the blade on the Luo River.

An indescribable pressure descended from the sky, like a giant mountain plummeting down.

The Angel could not see through the Sword of Great Light, but it could use the laws of the world to directly suppress it.

The light instantly dimmed.

The sands flurried and the winds raged as terrifying energy and Qi splashed everywhere as if they had physical form.

In the sandstorm, one could faintly make out the drifting figure of a girl in white, a white flower that had left its branch.

At this crucial moment, Chen Changsheng still had his eyes closed.

His spiritual sense had been chasing the Angel this entire time. Countless complicated lines gradually filled his painting, transforming it into a lake.

The entire courtyard was in this lake.

When Xu Yourong's Sword of Great Light descended, he sensed it.

He sensed the Angel's position.

All of his snowy plain instantly ignited.

All his true essence was madly sent forth.

A moment ago, he was still in the storm of swords.

A moment later, he was in front of the Angel.

And then, his sword stabbed.

Chapter 1028 – The True Final Move

When the spear point probed out of the void, Chen Changsheng had blocked it with the Stupid Sword.

From the moment he decided to kill the Demon Lord, entered the darkness, and finally when he faced off against the Angel of Sacred Light, he was using the Intellectual Sword.

So for his final move, he naturally used the Blazing Sword.

These were the three swords that Su Li had passed to him in the wilderness.

When it saw that sword glow, the Angel appeared slightly surprised and then raised its left hand.

It seemed to not think that Chen Changsheng's speed would suddenly become so fast, that his true essence would become so powerful.

With a light clap, the Angel used its fingers to snatch Chen Changsheng's sword. Unable to move, it was like a caught mosquito.

The Stainless Sword had an unequaled edge, but when tightly held, it could not cut through the Angel's fingers.

This should have been Chen Changsheng's strongest move, but it was of no threat to the Angel of Sacred Light.

Logically speaking, the Angel should have adopted a crushing demeanor and begun to attack Chen Changsheng.

But for some reason, a hint of fear appeared in the depths of its eyes.

Su Li was probably in the Sacred Light Continent right now, so perhaps it had seen this move before? Or had it sensed something else?

Chen Changsheng did not notice the change in the Angel's

emotions. He continued to burn his true essence and push forward.

The Stainless Sword did not advance a single hair.

The fear in the Angel's eyes became anger and its two fingers turned.

The Stainless Sword bent like a rainbow, but it did not snap.

A titanic energy traveled through the sword to Chen Changsheng's hands.

With a few light snaps, his wrist bones were covered in cracks, liable to break at any moment.

Chen Changsheng did not care. The three swords that Su Li had taught were not his true killing move.

These three swords were to help him arrive in front of the Angel.

On the hilt, the five stone pearls, the Heavenly Tome Monoliths, began to revolve, traveling up the sword to the Angel.

The Angel immediately felt that something was wrong.

The laws of the world in the space between it and Chen Changsheng were changing.

What object could change the laws of the world in such a small area?

The Angel's face suddenly went extremely pale, almost transparent. It was like it was made of glass.

Innumerable rays of light shot out of its body in every direction!

An ordinary cultivator of the continent would instantly be burned to death if they touched these light rays of limitless energy.

Chen Changsheng would not. His body was chock-full of the same light, and there was even more, and it was even purer.

The Angel immediately loosened its fingers and retreated into the darkness.

There was a clang as the Stainless Sword snapped back, its edge slicing through space but failing to touch the Angel's body.

The string of stone pearls shot out from the sword, yet they also failed to hit the Angel.

Several streams of light shone in Chen Changsheng's eyes, the marks left by the Angel as it flapped its wings.

With the Angel's speed, as long as it retreated, Chen Changsheng would find it hard to catch up, much less engage in close combat.

He could only watch that spear of light from the distance, leading him to fall into a truly hopeless situation.

Chen Changsheng did not panic, nor did he despair.

Because the Heavenly Tome Monoliths were not his true final move.

With a clack, the Stainless Sword and the Vault Sheath were separated.

Chen Changsheng gripped the top of the sheath and waved it at the darkness.

This action was similar to when Luoluo used the Falling Rain Whip, and it was also like someone sprinkling water.

Countless sword glows spat out of the sheath, a river of stars from which the faint cry of a dragon could be heard.

The Angel's wings incessantly flapped.

The darkness resounded with countless collisions.

It was sword against wing of light, but the sound was the clear and bright clash of metal on stone.

Sparks sputtered in the dark sky, a dazzling display of fireworks even more beautiful than the one previous.

The slashes of countless swords were not able to leave a single mark on those wings of light, so they were naturally unable to

wound the Angel's divine body.

The sword glows scattered like fireflies, unable to stop the Angel from leaving the bounds of the Heavenly Tome Monoliths' attack.

Even at this moment, Chen Changsheng was still very calm.

The Heavenly Tome Monoliths were not his final move, and neither was that previous rain of swords.

His final move was not in his sheath, nor was it in his hands.

That move was elsewhere.

It was not his sword.

It was her sword.

Xu Yourong returned from the darkness.

Great light returned.

The temple sword flew through the air, slashing at the Angel.

Chen Changsheng reached out his right hand, donning the string of pearls and snatching the hilt of his sword once more.

He once more used the Blazing Sword and slashed at the Angel.

Both his sword and Xu Yourong's sword exploded with infinite light and heat.

Two sword glows met in the darkness and became one, becoming so bright that it seemed like the sea of stars had descended upon the world of mortals.

Two sword intents melded, becoming monstrously powerful, reaching a state of utmost divinity and dignity.

Deep within the divinity and dignity was a somber killing intent.

This somber killing intent seemed to appear from nothing and instantly became absolutely majestic.

From the earth of yellow sand to the heavens divided by light and darkness, the world instantly turned torrid and dry.

Before these two sword glows, it seemed like the entire world would be set ablaze!

The Angel's gaze suddenly turned very profound.

It ceased to retreat.

It raised the spear of light.

It had sensed very clearly that these two sword glows that could incinerate the world could not be avoided with speed, only resisted with strength.

When Chen Changsheng's and Xu Yourong's sword glows met, the Demon Lord sensed something and a flabbergasted expression appeared on his face.

He instantly summoned all his demon artifacts and laid down layer after layer of arrays around him.

.....

.....

A power difficult to imagine appeared in the world.

Countless terrifying waves of Qi spread in every direction.

As winds shrieked, sand filled the sky.

The blind zither player was sent flying into the darkness.

The two blazing sword glows and their aura of destruction burned away at the darkness until it was extremely thin, and it seemed like it would rupture at any moment.

This courtyard was located close to the Xiang clan estate, by a stream, and beyond its walls on a certain side was a cliff.

At this moment, several hundred extremely thin pillars of stone appeared on this cliff. They looked like stone swords, exuding an intimidating aura.

Nobody noticed when these stone pillars had appeared or how they had appeared. It was a mystical sight.

The sands settled and the winds died. In the extremely thin darkness, sunlight once more illuminated the courtyard, revealing what was happening within.

Xu Yourong's face was as beautiful as a painting, her expression calm and focused. She had no visible injuries.

But the burning patches of fire behind her in the sands were probably blazing drops of Phoenix blood.

Chen Changsheng's face was very pale.

His sword-holding hand was trembling, blood seeping from it.

He had probably been heavily wounded.

Across from them.

The Angel stood in the sand, its right hand gripping the spear of light, its wings floating behind, its expression indifferent.

A few bloodstains could be seen on the sand, and also one broken white feather.

It was clear that it had also been wounded, and it had not been light.

Then this was enough.

.....

.....

The Angel of Sacred Light had been injured?

No matter how talented Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong were, they had still not managed to cross that threshold.

Until Wang Po had slashed out with his blade on the Luo River, he had been unable to harm Tie Shu.

So how had these two managed to accomplish such a feat?

As he observed this sight, the Demon Lord wondered in shock, was this two swords working in harmony?

Chapter 1029 – Two Streaks of Fire Tearing Through the Sky

Under the command of Military Advisor Black Robe, Xuelao City's intelligence network was extremely effective. The events of the ceremony to close South Stream Temple had long been written down in a very detailed report, and the report had even come with a painting drawn by a painter who had defected from the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets.

The Demon Lord had personally seen this painting, seen those two stunning sword glows in the painting. But he still found the description in the report too exaggerated. Only today, when he saw those two sword glows with his own eyes, did he realize that reality was even more absurd than the description in the report.

The Angel of Sacred Light quietly stared at Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong.

Golden blood trickled down from the tear in its white wing.

Its expression was still indifferent, but its eyes had turned serious.

It had not expected two young humans to block the full-force blow of its spear of light.

What made it even warier was Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong's sword intent.

The two sword intents fusing together was still not enough to defeat it, but there was something hidden within it that made it feel an unprecedented apprehension.

It made it feel even more apprehension than the string of stone pearls on Chen Changsheng's wrist.

That dry Qi that surged from the earth to the heavens, that aura that seemed like it could destroy all... just what was it?

.....

.....

The Angel of Sacred Light had an unfathomably deep well of experience to draw from, as it had already lived for ages upon ages. Moreover, it possessed sacred eyes bestowed by God.

So it could predict the terror of the stone pearls, could even recognize Chen Changsheng's three swords, see their trajectories, and break them.

But it did not know the identity of the aura revealed by Chen Changsheng's and Xu Yourong's combined swords.

This aura was one of destruction and came from the lost Halving Blade Style. More accurately it was The World Ablaze.

The Halving Blade Style was Zhou Dufu's supreme skill.

Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong's harmonization of swords had originated from when they had cultivated the Halving Blade Style in the Mausoleum of Zhou and the Mausoleum of Books.

When their sword glows descended, they naturally carried some of that hostility Zhou Dufu had for the entire world, that overpowering will that dared to destroy the world.

In the face of this will and Qi, even a divine expert from the other continent would feel fear.

Zhou Dufu was the supreme expert beneath the starry sky.

Both the Central Continent and the Sacred Light Continent were still beneath the starry sky.

The Angel took in a deep breath.

This single breath caused a turbulence in the surrounding air.

Its naked chest slowly rose, then fell.

Countless thunderclaps could faintly be heard.

It raised the spear of light and pointed it at Chen Changsheng and

Xu Yourong.

Fear was because its long life had been threatened, which had stimulated a limitless desire to kill.

This was the instinct of life, even for a servant of God.

The Angel had decided to kill Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong, had decided to use its strongest move, even if it would worsen its injuries.

It could not permit these two young humans to continue maturing.

From several dozen zhang away, Chen Changsheng could sense the terrifying pressure from the spear.

He was not intending to escape, as the Angel was too fast. Even if Xu Yourong could keep up, he could not.

He raised his left hand and pointed it at the spear.

The stone pearls on his wrist began to spin, clacking against each other.

It was a very soft sound, but it contained the boundless strength of time.

The thousand-some sword glows scattered across the dark skies flew back to quietly hover around him and Xu Yourong.

The South Stream Temple sword array was formed once more, and now it had the Heavenly Tome Monoliths as a foundation. Chen Changsheng was confident that this could resist the Angel's attack, at least for a while.

As long as they could buy some time, he and Xu Yourong could attack.

He was confident that Xu Yourong understood his meaning, but out of the corner of his eyes, he saw her lightly shake her head.

We cannot continue to fight, or else too many people will die.

If the priests outside the courtyard did not have the protection of the Li Palace's grand array, they would assuredly be killed by the ripples from the coming battle.

And how many demi-human people in White Emperor City would die?

Chen Changsheng glanced at her and knew what she was thinking.

He had no objection.

"Go."

Chen Changsheng declared.

Xu Yourong stretched out her left hand and grabbed his collar.

He was quite a bit taller than Xu Yourong, but it took little strength for her to grab him. She seemed very practiced, as if she had done this no small number of times.

Boom.

Sands flew haphazardly while cold winds howled.

White wings flickered into existence, then vanished.

Xu Yourong and Chen Changsheng left.

A hole had been punched in the clouds up in the dark sky.

The Li Palace's grand array had very naturally opened a path.

The Angel in the sky currently contending against the Li Palace array was too late to stop them.

The golden blood stopped trickling down. The white feather on the ground was striking.

The Angel raised its head to the sky with confusion in its eyes.

It did not understand why the young humans had chosen this method to fight.

As a servant of God, it could innately use the laws of the world.

Even the fastest expert of this continent could not surpass it in speed.

Confusion persisted for only an instant.

Countless rays of light illuminated the night.

Another hole appeared in the sky.

Wings flapped in the wind.

The answer was also flying in the wind.

The Angel transformed into a streak of light, flying there to continue its search.

The courtyard fell quiet.

The Demon Lord strode out from the darkness and raised its head to the clouds in the sky, at those two holes slowly closing in the clouds.

"I'm really envious."

He sighed, "I'd want nothing more than for the two of you to have your hair go white in a single night, but I also don't want you to get white-haired and die together. Which one is better?"

.....

.....

The darkness only enveloped half of the courtyard.

Not far from the ground was the clear and bright sunlight.

All of White Emperor City could see the strange sight in the sky.

It was two dazzling streaks of fire.

In front of both of those streaks of fire, one could faintly make out a figure flapping two wings of pure white.

The demi-humans who saw this were shocked speechless. Some people thought they were seeing gods, and kowtowed on the ground.

The two streaks of fire seemed to be traveling slowly through the sky, but they were actually flying up at incredible speeds, one chasing after the other.

In a few seconds, the two streaks of fire entered an even higher cloud layer.

The clouds exploded with light, as if they were ablaze.

.....

.....

The icy winds at high speeds struck the face like a cold knife.

The flapping of wings compressed air at unimaginable speeds, resulting in massive booms and cracks.

Xu Yourong carried Chen Changsheng and flew into the sky, deep into the clouds. They were surrounded by a vast white.

If one lacked experience, it was easy to lose track of one's directions, and perhaps even smash into the ground.

Xu Yourong naturally would not have this problem.

Chen Changsheng had flown on a crane many times, so he was also very calm.

Perhaps it was because the air was getting thinner or the clouds were getting thicker, but their surroundings were very quiet.

Chen Changsheng turned to look at Xu Yourong.

The sunlight penetrating through the thick clouds was diffused into gentle rays of light, making her face beautiful beyond compare.

The beauty here did not refer to this world of light and shadows.

It was the painting of her eyes and brows, the crystalline beads of sweat on her hair.

Chen Changsheng suddenly asked, "You often bring people flying?"

Xu Yourong glanced at him, confused as to why he had chosen this moment to ask such a question.

Chapter 1030 – A Chat Between Lovers in the Clouds

In extremely dangerous moments, one should ask what to do next or where one should go. Even if one thought that death was certain and wanted to leave behind some powerful last words, they would often think back to the start of their lives—just like Chen Changsheng did when he was imprisoned by Mo Yu in the Tong Palace and then encountered the Black Dragon.

So Xu Yourong did not understand what Chen Changsheng was doing.

A normal girl might have been angry or annoyed, coldly snorting and proceeding to ignore the question.

But she was not an ordinary girl. She was a girl who could act as the successor to the seat of Holy Maiden while still going every ten-some days to the village to play mahjong, a girl who did not even mind using her sword to kill a lustful gambling den owner. And besides, there was nothing to do in the clouds, and though the Angel of Sacred Light was terrifying, it still had not caught up.

"I brought you flying before."

"You didn't try it with Shuang'er on your last visit to the capital?"

"I'm not a Red Goose, nor am I a flying carriage."

Xu Yourong's tone was still very calm, but Chen Changsheng could tell that she was beginning to lose her patience.

He explained, "I just feel like you're very practiced."

Xu Yourong said, "As I said, I brought you flying before."

Chen Changsheng naturally would not forget.

Back in the Garden of Zhou, when he was being pursued by Nanke's two wings, he fell into the bottom of the lake and emerged

in a pool on the outskirts of the Plains of the Unsetting Sun. By the time he emerged from the water, he was already unconscious.

He had only learned what had happened from her later on.

At that time, she had leapt from Sunset Valley to escape. Her soul had awakened again and two Phoenix wings had emerged behind her back.

Was this how she had held him as she flew?

Chen Changsheng still felt a little uncomfortable.

Any man who was carried in the hands of his fiancée would probably feel the same.

And if it was just one time, why were her movements so adept? Did she routinely practice? For what?

Xu Yourong saw his expression and knew what he was thinking. She faintly smiled. "Later on, when you were unconscious, I carried you quite a few times."

This referred to the events after they entered the Plains of the Unsetting Sun.

At the time, she had been heavily injured and Chen Changsheng was unconscious. If she wanted to leave with him, what other method did she have besides carrying him?

Although she had carried him while walking, not carried him while flying, it was carrying all the same.

Chen Changsheng also understood and regretfully said, "Back then, I always put you on my back."

Xu Yourong said, "You're taller than me. How could I put you on my back?"

Chen Changsheng thought this was reasonable, but then found it very unreasonable.

I'm taller than you, so it's not easy for you to put me on your

back, but does that mean it's somehow easier to carry me?

After thinking about this problem for a long time, he finally felt that she could only have been carrying him by the belt.

He found such a sight somewhat difficult to think about, so he fell quiet.

Xu Yourong asked, "Your final method was the Heavenly Tome Monoliths?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "No, it was you."

There was no hesitation when he gave this answer. It did not take even a moment of thought.

These were the most awkward of romantic words, so his performance truly made him seem like a flirting master.

Xu Yourong knew that he was not.

His answer was not a remark of love, but the truth.

But she still blushed.

Because her final method was also him.

This feeling that they were not flirting, but speaking the truth, this feeling that they were a perfect couple, truly made one feel a little shy.

She suddenly thought of a problem and asked, "You knew that I came?"

There were many details in that battle within the courtyard.

From Chen Changsheng's response, he was probably waiting for her to strike.

"On the day that Chusu was driven away, I was in a bit of a mess due to various matters, so it didn't occur to me."

Chen Changsheng continued, "Later, when I was burying Senior Bie Yanghong and Wuqiong Bi, I saw the burns on the stones and guessed that you had come."

Xu Yourong asked, "So you've been waiting for me to appear the entire time?"

Chen Changsheng explained, "Since you were in White Emperor City, you would definitely appear when I couldn't hold on anymore."

This was still the truth, not a romantic remark.

Xu Yourong's blush deepened.

To hide her shyness and her hot cheeks that the cold winds could not cool, she decided to give him a few words of criticism.

"You should have told me this plan. There was no need to put yourself in so much danger."

Chen Changsheng knew that his calculation abilities were far inferior to hers. If he had told her his plans, the result might have been even better.

At the very least, they would not have been forced into these high altitudes where they were being pursued by that terrifying Angel.

The problem was that she had not wanted to reveal herself for various reasons, so how could he tell her his plan?

Would it have to be like the time he was standing on the banyan tree while Tang Thirty-Six was standing under it and the two of them were shouting so that the entire capital could hear?

Xu Yourong added, "It didn't matter if I didn't know, but there is a person that should have been informed beforehand."

Chen Changsheng did not understand who she was referring to.

In this complicated and extremely dangerous plan, just who would be more important than her, worthier of his trust?

Just when he was prepared to ask, the surrounding environment suddenly changed.

The clouds in front of them suddenly became extremely sticky,

almost like flowing sand.

Their speed greatly decreased.

A hint of wariness appeared in Xu Yourong's eyes.

Chen Changsheng immediately waved his left hand. Countless swords flew through the air, slashing at the increasingly thick clouds.

Sword intents continuously hacked at the clouds, cutting out a rather tenuous path.

Xu Yourong also acted, the true flames of the Heavenly Phoenix blazing out from her wings, burning away at the clouds.

With a whoosh, they charged through the thick layer of clouds.

The clouds burst.

They saw the sun.

The sun in the sky did not appear to have the color it seemed to have when viewed from the ground. It was pure white, exuding infinite light.

The clouds were also white, and as they reflected the white rays of light, even the blue sky was painted white.

All the two could see was a world of white.

The blazing light was very dazzling.

Several dozen li to the west was a small black dot.

In their eyes, this black dot rapidly expanded, becoming a figure.

Dressed in a deep blue robe, Madam Mu stood at the end of the clouds, her hands held behind her.

Seeing this graceful Saint, Xu Yourong fell into silent thought.

She had not expected that while the White Emperor had returned from the Starfall Mountains, Madam Mu had appeared here.

Moreover, Madam Mu made her recall the woman she had most

revered in her entire life.

She clearly knew that the situation was in her control, but she felt an intense unease.

Chen Changsheng did not know everything, but his reaction was actually calmer.

"She is not her."

Only Xu Yourong understood what he meant.

Chen Changsheng was not intimidated by Madam Mu's demeanor.

He did not feel Madam Mu to be very similar to the Tianhai Divine Empress.

The current evaluation of the Tianhai Divine Empress could be described as very mixed, and this would probably also be the case in the history books.

But there was one point that no one would dare to deny, not even his teacher, Shang Xingzhou.

She had a broad mind.

This did not mean that she was lenient or compassionate, but referred to the state of affairs.

The Tianhai Divine Empress's heart embraced the world.

Whether she wanted the world to flourish or die, her gaze was always on the world.

Madam Mu was of noble background and extremely high status. She dared to ally with the demons, collude with the other continent, but her eyes were always fixed on the present.

But this did not mean that she was not powerful enough.

At the very least, Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong were no match for her.

Not even if they combined their swords in harmony.

The clouds roiled again, then bulged, then burst apart like a flower blooming.

The Angel of Sacred Light broke through the clouds.

Chapter 1031 – The Unhurried Tiger

In the end, Xu Yourong and Chen Changsheng had still been delayed in the abruptly thickening cloud layer for a time and failed to throw off the Angel of Sacred Light. Although they had not intended to throw off the Angel, when they saw Madam Mu, it became their only choice.

The Angel sensed Madam Mu's existence and turned to look at her, its indifferent eyes subtly changing.

Even it had to admit that Madam Mu was powerful.

Madam Mu gazed back at the Angel, her brows slowly rising.

She could clearly sense that this Angel of Sacred Light had gotten even stronger.

Was it because it had gradually adapted to the laws of this world as it spent more time here?

But then she sensed the familiar scent on the divine Qi exuded by the Angel.

She now realized why the Demon Lord had insisted on taking part in the Heavenly Selection ceremony.

.....

.....

Madam Mu stood several dozen li away, to the west.

The Angel of Sacred Li stood several dozen li away, to the east.

This situation seemed impossible to resolve.

Even Bie Yanghong resurrected would find it impossible to resolve.

Wang Po and the Mount Li Sword Sect Master could not suddenly cross tens of thousands of li to this place.

Not even an expert of the Divine Domain could completely

disregard distance.

Who could resolve this problem?

Chen Changsheng noted, "It seems like there really is a problem with my plan."

Xu Yourong said, "It's just a little trouble. There's no problem."

Chen Changsheng said, "I'm worried that the White Emperor won't act."

Xu Yourong said, "Since he's seen all living beings, he will definitely act."

Confused, Chen Changsheng said, "They're still husband and wife."

Xu Yourong pointed out, "That's because you don't know who their original objective is."

Chen Changsheng still did not understand. "Even if the White Emperor does act, he's not guaranteed to succeed."

Xu Yourong replied, "It's the same thing. Since he's seen all living beings, he will definitely succeed."

Chen Changsheng still did not understand, but the Angel's spear of light had already arrived.

The dazzling sunlight seemed to be swallowed up by the terrifying energy in the tip of the spear.

The sky suddenly dimmed, the clouds turning gray.

Light descended once more, brimming with the purest and most dignified Qi. It came from the temple sword.

Pure white wings drew shadow after shadow onto the sky.

Countless swords followed and pursued like a twisting and turning waterfall.

It was a grandiose and beautiful sight.

A sword intent suddenly rose from the storm of swords and entered the great light.

The light did not brighten, but it seemed to gain weight. Just like the clouds from before, it became extremely viscous and sticky.

The Angel of Sacred Light abruptly slowed.

Two sword glows.

Descended together.

They brought with them an indescribably exquisite trajectory and indescribable momentum.

The sword intent clashed with the spear of limitless energy.

The sun in the sky instantly darkened.

The clouds blown by the violent winds obscured all directions. The world for ten-some li in every direction was awash with feathery clouds.

An invisible and enormous bell burst apart in the heavens, sending out countless waves of sound and arrows of Qi.

The wisps of clouds in the sky gradually dispersed, making it clear and bright once more.

The Angel of Sacred Light remained in its original position, but Xu Yourong and Chen Changsheng had retreated several li.

Blazing Phoenix blood, shattered sword glows, and one broken feather, whiter than snow, could be seen amongst the gradually settling clouds.

Just like in the courtyard, the Angel had been injured, but Xu Yourong and Chen Changsheng had suffered greater injuries.

The harmonization of swords arising from the Halving Blade Style and the South Stream Temple sword array truly did have a strength that could surpass cultivation levels, so they had been able to draw with Wuqiong Bi. However, they still could not defeat

an expert on the level of this otherworldly Angel.

But no one would think that Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong were very weak.

With their current age and cultivation level, just wounding the Angel was already nigh unimaginable.

Just like the Angel, Madam Mu had also seen many problems in those two sword glows. A hint of surprise appeared in her eyes.

The goosefeather clouds grew still. A ravine appeared in the sea of clouds, and within it was a very small hole.

Xu Yourong and Chen Changsheng had disappeared, flying down into the sea of clouds through that hole.

A streak of fire appeared in the sky and the clouds roiled. The Angel had followed in pursuit.

Beneath those clouds were the mountains on the opposite shore of the Red River.

Madam Mu was keenly aware of this.

She thought of the Qi that could set the world ablaze in those two sword glows, thought of the Wildfire of the Celestial Trees in those mountains, and the surprise in her eyes deepened.

She believed that this was Xu Yourong's method of fighting. She felt a faint admiration for the Holy Maiden's calculation abilities, and then a faint ridicule and pity.

But she was not prepared to wait until Xu Yourong discovered her error, because that person had already returned to White Emperor City.

Her blue gown fluttered and her two sleeves summoned the winds.

The sea of clouds began to leap about like cotton being teased.

Every place that leaped up was a sign that the clouds in a sphere

several hundred zhang in radius were being compressed and bound together.

The sea of clouds was gradually parted, gathering up in various places, slowly breaking into countless islands.

Those islands continued to compress, a monstrous strength filling every crevice of space within them.

No matter where Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong were in those clouds, they could not escape.

The cloud islands continued to internally compress, every wisp of cloud and nearly-condensed water drop clinging to each other, creating a terrifying weight.

Even the rays of light from the sun would slightly bend as they passed by the edges of those clouds.

If these clouds continued to compress, it wouldn't matter that Xu Yourong had the blood of the Heavenly Phoenix or that Chen Changsheng had a stainless constitution. They would still end up being crushed to death.

This was Cloud Herding, the strongest technique of the Great Western Continent's Imperial clan.

This was the divine art of a Saint.

.....

.....

Countless balls of clouds continued to compress, transforming into all kinds of shapes.

One cloud was like a pirate from the Great Western Continent, another was like a portrait of Grand Scholar Tungus, and one cloud... was like a tiger.

The blue gown ceased to flutter.

The sleeves went still.

Madam Mu quietly gazed at that cloud.

The cloud in the gradually dispersing sea of clouds quietly gazed at her.

Like a tiger in the wind-blown grasslands quietly watching.

The clouds were white, and the grasslands were also white, as if they had been painted with frost.

It was a white tiger.

Chapter 1032 – I Walked the Path You Used to Get Here

Not long ago, the White Emperor returned to his city.

And then, he returned to his Imperial City.

But Madam Mu was not there.

As he gazed at the deserted observation platform and the quiet stone hall, the White Emperor perked his brows.

He did not do so out of surprise or shock. Perhaps it signified interest.

The White Emperor walked up to the stone railing, feeling with his hands the coldness that he had not felt for several years. He gazed down at the Whalefall Platform, of which a large part was now collapsed, making it completely different from several years ago. With a serene expression, he recalled several matters, calculated several matters.

There was very little in the world that could surprise him.

Everyone believed that he would be in a rush to search for his wife to seize back his Imperial City, his city, and his country.

But this was not the case. He did not urgently seek out his wife, but stood by the railing and quietly waited.

Waited for those events taking place to reach a conclusion.

Waited until several things that he wanted to see had happened.

He quietly regarded the rivers and mountains, regarded the world, and then his gaze fell on that courtyard in the western part of the city.

The air above that courtyard was split into light and dark. It was quite conspicuous, so how could he not see it?

But this was still not enough. Even though the Angel in that ball

of light in the darkness was getting clearer and clearer, it was still not enough.

He then heard the strumming of a zither and the cries of swords, saw the stone sculpture in the darkness slowly opening its eyes.

The White Emperor's brows rose in excitement, a desire to kill gradually emerging, though it was hard to tell who this was aimed at.

The Pope and the Holy Maiden could make him see all living beings, so they could naturally have this person from another race appear before all living beings.

Two streaks of fire tore through the darkness and through the Li Palace's array, flying high into the sky.

Everyone in White Emperor City could see this.

The White Emperor was also quietly watching this scene.

His gaze followed those streaks of fire as they traveled upward, ultimately resting on the uppermost layer of clouds.

He was not looking at the place where those streaks of fire vanished into the clouds, but several dozen li away.

This place was to the west. Even if it was several dozen li away, it was still inclined to the west.

The White Emperor sighed in regret.

.....

.....

When that tiger-shaped cloud appeared in the sky, Madam Mu stopped her actions.

The sea of clouds returned to normal. Xu Yourong and Chen Changsheng descended toward the mountains on the other side of the Red River and the streak of fire followed.

Madam Mu paid no attention to that side. She only quietly stared

at that white cloud.

"Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong will still die, though I think that you won't care too much about this, because it has nothing to do with you."

Though the cloud looked very similar to a tiger, it was still a cloud. It naturally would not reply.

It was hard to say who she was addressing.

"You've always loved hiding behind the curtains, letting others fight in front of the curtains until you think the time is right to pluck the fruit and make your appearance."

Madam Mu jeered, "In this play of husband and wife, how could I not know what you were thinking? And how could I let you use me?"

The tiger cloud gradually dispersed.

Madam Mu's expression turned indifferent once more.

.....

.....

The mountains roared with wind.

A massive Celestial Tree was swaying in the fierce winds, its higher branches snapping, their fragments raining down.

A terrifying crack would occasionally rise from deep within its colossal trunk.

The priests of the Celestial Tree temple and the guards watched this sight with shocked and pale faces. Shouts and yells could be heard all over.

Two streams of light wound their way through the branches, dragging flames behind them and spreading stars of fire.

If not for the fact that the Celestial Tree was nurtured by the Wildfire beneath the ground, perhaps it would already be aflame.

As the Celestial Tree swayed, the scorching Qi of the Wildfire emerged from the branches and leaves and into the sky, steaming out a massive hole in the clouds.

With a boom, the two streams of light clashed and parted.

Ten-some thick and heavy branches snapped as two figures crashed into the trunk, making two massive holes before they fell to the ground.

Xu Yourong's wings were stained with golden blood and embers while Chen Changsheng's Daoist robe was drenched in blood.

He looked around him and found his surroundings rather familiar, though he did not have the time to carefully think.

In a ray of sunlight, the Angel of Sacred Light slowly descended to the ground. The spear of light in its hand was somewhat thinner and the blood mottling its surface was starkly evident.

Chen Changsheng raised his sword and stood in front of Xu Yourong.

The Stainless Sword had clashed four times with the spear of light. The sword itself had remained unharmed, but his body was at its breaking point, his right hand constantly shaking.

It was evident that Xu Yourong's choice had led to a massive mistake.

She had probably planned to borrow the Wildfire of the Celestial Trees to increase the power of her Phoenix flames, at the same time using the ancestral spirits of the Demi-human race to suppress the soul of this Angel.

Yet the ancestral spirits in the Celestial Trees had no reaction to this Angel, as if they had already accepted it. Even more frightening was that the Wildfire exuded by the leaves and branches was being absorbed by the Angel, making it stronger. Just why was this?

Xu Yourong's state was somewhat better than Chen Changsheng's, though her face was also rather pale. Yet her expression was very indifferent.

Chen Changsheng was somewhat worried and confused. He thought, is a brightly lit heart this formidable? In these circumstances, how can she still be so calm?

He had no time to think through these questions.

The Angel of Sacred Light had already walked over, releasing a pressure as vast as the sea of stars.

.....

.....

When Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong were at a desperate impasse in the mountains, the situation in White Emperor City was also incredibly dangerous.

Mao Qiuyu had remained in the capital, so the Li Palace's grand array was not complete. After holding that ball of light in the darkness for so long, it finally showed signs of breaking.

A cruel darkness began to silently drift from the courtyard, sweeping toward Tang Thirty-Six.

The Orthodoxy's Divine Staff was bursting with light in Tang Thirty-Six's hand, presiding over the array. He had no mind to spare, and certainly none to retreat.

Linghai Zhiwang and the other archbishops were currently pouring all their true essence and spiritual sense into maintaining the array, contending against the Angel in the light.

The blind zither player had been heavily injured and retreated out of the courtyard. He had still not recovered his breath.

Cosmetic powder filled the sky, chains rattled, and cudgels beat apart the darkness.

The government laborers and the girl appeared in front of Tang

Thirty-Six and blocked the Demon Lord's sneak attack.

But they could not stop that thick darkness from disturbing the connection between the Divine Staff and the other treasures of the Orthodoxy.

It had to be said that the Demon Lord's choice of time and target were perfect.

Under the fierce assaults of the Angel, the incomplete Li Palace array had been hanging by a thread, and now, it finally snapped.

There was a clap of thunder from far up in the sky, and a crisp shattering.

It was like the naughty cub of some demi-human tribe hundreds of li away had broken a porcelain jar that his grandfather had exchanged for three hundred jin of furs in human territory.

The jar was shattered, and liquid light seeped out, bringing with it a world of darkness that enclosed the light of the Li Palace's grand array, cutting at it, eroding it.

Chapter 1033 – The Bronze Mirror Breaks, the Daoist Exits

The light originated from a sleek and breathtaking beautiful pestle of light.

This pestle was held in a steady and terrifying hand.

This hand belonged to the Angel that had broken out of the misty light.

This Angel of Sacred Light governed war and was named Anger's Flame by Bie Yanghong. Its eyes of inhuman emotion were brimming with violence and a desire to kill.

In its eyes, these human experts were naught but ants.

That it had been held by these ants for so long was a humiliation that it could not bear.

To purge this humiliation, it had decided to kill everyone around this courtyard—no, everyone in this entire city.

The seemingly solid liquid light sprinkled into the surrounding sky at its will, carrying with it an unimaginable power.

Any living being that touched this liquid light would become cold, losing both its breath and soul.

Whether it was the birds in the sky or the flowers and trees growing along the stream outside the courtyard.

Golden light poured over the Li Palace's array, and countless bolts of lightning lit up the darkness, bringing with them the booming sound of thunder and powerful attacks.

The Falling Star Stone was spinning quickly, but the black passage was getting smaller. The Gloom Willow appeared mottled and all the treasures began to be suppressed.

The Angel saw those ants still struggling, and the brutality in its

eyes deepened. It let out a howl bursting with the desire to kill.

The howl descended upon the ground, bringing a massive gale that burst the eardrums of many priests, even knocking some of the weaker ones unconscious.

Finally, the porcelain jar completely broke, shattering shard by shard, just like the blue sky suddenly appearing over everyone's head.

The Falling Star Stone, the Gloom Willow, and the other treasures flew back into the hands of the Prefects.

The Li Palace's grand array was broken, and as the ones maintaining it, they suffered the greatest backlash. They instantly paled as giant waves raged in their seas of consciousness.

Tang Thirty-Six, as the array pivot, suffered the greatest damage. He vomited blood and swayed, his hand almost losing its grip on the Divine Staff.

The cosmetic-buying girl rushed back to his side and steadied him while the other Tang clan experts surrounded him.

The blind zither player arduously stood up, his blood-covered fingers shakily plucking the zither strings, letting out dull notes.

The darkness swept out from the courtyard. Unaffected by the zither notes, it quickly came to the gate.

The Demon Lord walked out of the darkness.

He held a stone pestle in his hand. There seemed nothing special about it, but it seemed to magically attract everyone's attention.

The Angel also emerged from the darkness, but it was higher in the sky, above everyone.

The light pouring down from the sky did not drive away the darkness, but followed the darkness in shrouding the courtyard and its surroundings.

Everyone felt an unimaginable pressure and their faces rapidly

paled.

Several hundred priests forced themselves to endure the pain as their seas of consciousness were shaken. They lowered their heads and began to recite scriptures.

The pious voices of recitation resounded around the courtyard, resisting the pressure of the light and naturally adding a hint of tragedy to the scene.

Linghai Zhiwang, An Lin, and the other Prefects came to the front gate of the courtyard and stared at the Demon Lord.

They knew that if they wanted to survive today, their only chance was to kill the Demon Lord before the Angel could strike.

But would the Angel give them this chance?

"I had no intention of using this method to kill all of you."

The Demon Lord ruefully sighed. "Alas, none of you gave me any other choice."

The blind zither player remained silent, Linghai Zhiwang's expression flickered, and Tang Thirty-Six tightly gripped the Divine Staff.

They could hear that the Demon Lord was speaking the truth.

.....

.....

Two Angels of the Sacred Light, separated by a hundred-some li, appeared in the sky at the same time.

The two shores of the Red River, whether in was the mountains or the city of stone, were entirely wrapped in light.

This light contained a monstrous pressure and announced that a powerful being from another world was descending.

Witnessing this sight and feeling the divine pressure of that light scared the people of White Emperor City out of their wits. Many

people simply sat on the ground out of fright, and even the bravest demi-human warrior paled, unable to summon even a shred of courage.

The demi-human personages who had entered the Imperial City, like Jin Yulu, Xiaode, the Shi clan leader, and the Bear tribe leader, also saw those two Angels in the sky. They still stood, not falling over in fear, but they had extremely unpleasant expressions.

The observation platform remained quiet. The White Emperor might be fighting against Madam Mu, so who would handle these two Angels?

These two Angels were opponents that they could not possibly defeat, which made them extremely furious and unwilling.

"I'm very unhappy."

Jin Yulu took a massive axe from the Bear tribe leader's belt and turned to Xiaode. "You throw me into the sky. I want to try and hack off their heads."

He was the oldest and most powerful of those present, so no one objected.

The other demi-human experts were also very unhappy.

Xiaode coldly said, "I plan to ride a black vulture up there and see if I can stab my blade into that fellow."

The Bear tribe leader said, "Then I'll throw."

Jin Yulu agreed and pointed at the Angel above White Emperor City. "I'll take this one."

Xiaode pointed at the Angel over the mountains on the opposite shore. "Then I'll take this one."

.....

.....

The unhappiness of the demi-human experts mostly came from

the attitudes of these two Angels.

These two Angel were too apathetic. Even though they sensed the powerful fighting intent of the demi-human experts, their expressions still did not change.

It was like all the experts of this city, perhaps all the experts of this continent, were nothing more than ants.

And those people with faces of fear who would probably have collapsed if not for the density of the crowd were even more worthy of being called ants.

The vast majority of the populace had poured out onto the streets, and were fleeing for the hills or fearfully staring at the sky.

The inn on the street was already empty. A stray cat stealthily entered the kitchen, hoping to steal some just-cooked meat.

A light crack came from a room on the second floor, like a mirror had fallen and broken.

The stray cat that had just lithely leapt onto the stove was startled. With a meow, it fled through the window and vanished.

The crowd was wanly looking up at the sky, unaware of the noise in the inn or of what had occurred within.

After a few moments, a blue-clothed Daoist walked out of the inn.

The Daoist had calm and deep eyes and a head of black hair without the slightest tinge of frost. He walked with an indescribable ease, but an arch of his brow had a threatening nobility.

From his appearance, he appeared around twenty. From his demeanor, he was at least two hundred and had spent those years in the royal courts. If one looked at his eyes, it would not be absurd to say that he had lived a thousand years. Of course, these years were spent traversing the underworld.

No one noticed this blue-clothed Daoist.

He walked into the crowd, looking up to the sky just like the rest of the demi-humans, gazing at those two Angels of Sacred Light.

The eyes of the demi-humans were full of fear, despair, and even some madness.

There was no emotion in this Daoist's eyes, only apathy. It was like he was looking at the dead.

Chapter 1034 – Broken Feathers

When the blue-clothed Daoist looked up to sky, so did the White Emperor.

However, he was not looking at those two Angels of Sacred Light, but at that side of the clouds, to the west.

"This is the greatest change the world has gone through in the last few years. You are confident that you control everything in the world, can disregard all living beings between the heavens and earth, and also me, but there is another heavens and earth beyond this world. Can you continue to remain so calm?"

Madam Mu indifferently said to him, "Perhaps there is no one in this world that can go against you, so I borrowed forces from beyond the heavens. You did not think of this, so you still ended up losing control of the situation. Now what will you do?"

The White Emperor gazed into the clouds and earnestly asked, "You are sure that you have complete control of the situation?"

Madam Mu replied, "Of course you are powerful, but for the sake of deceiving the entire continent, you've become much weaker... There's a saying that goes 'by fooling others, one ends up fooling yourself'. Isn't it talking precisely about someone like you, a dull man with too many suspicions? Even if I can't beat you, I can at least keep you here for a while."

If she could delay the White Emperor for a while, the two Angels could kill Chen Changsheng, Xu Yourong, and a group of the Orthodoxy's experts, after which they would massacre those demi-human experts loyal to the White Emperor. With that done, the situation would be settled.

The White Emperor smiled. "Yun'er, since you know how suspicious I am, are you not worried that I have other preparations?"

The nickname 'Yun'er' caused a deep loathing to appear in Madam Mu's eyes. "Bai Xingye, put away these little tricks of yours. I feel disgusted just hearing it. It's been several centuries now, and now that it's come to this, can't we just speak seriously?"

The White Emperor's smile faded and he became sincerer. "You talk; I'll listen."

"Back then, Shang Xingzhou tricked you into thinking that you could easily pluck the fruit that was the Demon Lord. In the end, you and the Demon Lord both left with terrible injuries. All you could do these last few years was sit on your mountain of rock and watch as his fame soared, so how could you be happy? Since he tricked you, how could he dare to come here? How could he not be afraid that you would trick him back?"

Madam Mu sneered, "There's a saying that goes 'suspicious people are certain to die in their suspicions', and it refers exactly to people like you and Shang Xingzhou."

The White Emperor calmly replied, "Your words are reasonable, but you also know that today's situation is different."

Madam Mu answered, "Even if Shang Xingzhou wants to come, he's too late. And if he could come, why haven't you killed me yet?"

The White Emperor ruefully sighed, "Do you still not believe that I've never thought about killing you?"

After he said this, the White Emperor's eyes suddenly changed.

His pupils vanished, leaving only the white. It was a horrifying sight, almost fiendish.

Everything between the heavens and earth was white. It could be the sea of clouds, and it could also be a plain of snow.

The signs of a fierce blizzard appeared in his eyes.

The clouds around Madam Mu suddenly began to stir and spread in every direction, appearing like heavy snowfall.

An extremely condensed strength traveled from the clouds to the ground.

With a massive rumble, countless trees within the Imperial City toppled while the stone halls cracked.

The observation platform, which directly received this strength, even sank half a foot into the ground!

The observation platform sank into the mountain, but it did not collapse.

Because the White Emperor was on the platform.

His hands held behind him, he quietly gazed up at the sky.

Along with that strength, countless wispy clouds were brought down to the observation platform.

These were clouds from the Western Sea, burdened with unimaginable moisture and weight.

But when those clouds met the White Emperor's body, they instantly lost all weight, leaving only the purest color.

Countless white wisps of cloud began to circle around the White Emperor's body. With unimaginable speed, they spun themselves into a viscous ball of clouds.

This ball of clouds was dense with light and heat. Not even the swift razor-sharp winds could alter its shape in the slightest.

This gathering of clouds did not look like a pirate, nor like Grand Scholar Tungus.

A rumble like a peal of thunder exploded over White Emperor City.

The ball of white clouds moved toward that courtyard in the western part of the city, leaving a clear figure of light on the blue sky.

It was a white tiger even more massive than the Starfall

Mountains.

.....

.....

The sight of this white tiger in the sky elicited countless ecstatic cheers from White Emperor City.

The Angel of Sacred Light that had just broken out of the Li Palace array and was preparing to kill all the human priests and all the demi-human people in the city looked up toward the sky.

It was the Angel of War. Amongst God's servants, it was the most ruthless and murderous, and it had never feared anything.

But when it saw that image of light in the sky, saw that white cloud rushing toward it, it still felt an intense danger. It even thought of fleeing.

It could sense clearly that this was the strongest opponent it had faced on this continent.

It was even more powerful than the human expert it had killed several days ago.

In an extremely brief span of time, the Angel of Sacred Light made a decision.

It pushed its fighting intent to its highest point, let out a thunderous bellow, gripped its pestle of light, and smashed it at the cloud.

If the White Emperor was using his true body to attack, the Angel might have chosen a temporary retreat, but since this was just a soul, it was confident in its victory.

The white tiger formed from clouds arrived over the courtyard. It opened its mouth, revealing its sharp teeth, and bit at the pestle of light.

Crack!

Countless tiny but dangerous bolts of lightning burst out from the collision between tiger fangs and pestle of light.

Thunder exploded in the sky as vicious gales scattered both the darkness and light over the courtyard.

A monstrous pressure crushed all the buildings in the courtyard. Even the sand on the ground was compressed into bricks!

The priests could no longer endure and began to scatter.

Tang Thirty-Six, guarded by the blind zither player and the rest of Fivekind Man, vomited blood, his complexion further paling.

The Demon Lord wanted to lunge forward and kill him, but suddenly sensed something.

He turned to the sky, an expression of shock and absolute disbelief on his face.

.....

.....

In the sky.

A blue-clothed Daoist silently appeared behind the Angel.

The Angel of Sacred Light was engaged in battle with the White Emperor's soul, so all its attention was focused on the pestle of light.

But it was an Angel born from the laws of the world. For it to not notice the appearance of the man behind it was still practically unthinkable.

It was a bizarre scene, a frightening scene.

The blue-clothed Daoist stretched out his hands and grabbed the Angel's wings.

The Angel finally sensed him, and endless fear blossomed in its eyes like the abyss.

It was too late for it to do anything, even turn its head.

Rip.

It was soft.

Like a maid tearing apart a fan.

A young master tearing apart his books.

The blue-clothed Daoist tore off the Angel's wings!

A scream ripped through the air.

It was a scream of infinite anguish, infinite rage, infinite despair.
Like true thunder, it reverberated in the heavens above White
Emperor City.

Chapter 1035 – Plucking a Sword

The scream burst out of a roiling thunderstorm. Waves sloshed out of the Red River, sending foam up into the sky and back into the waters, concealing the frightened Jings as they fled.

The Angel fell to the earth as it screamed, its golden blood drenching the skies with two dazzling lines.

In its heavily injured state of unbearable suffering, it still remained calm, seeking out the final ray of hope amidst despair.

Its two wings had been torn off by the blue-clothed Daoist, robbing it of the lightning-like speed it was so proud of. It decided to give up on flying, allowing itself to drop to the ground. Its speed increased, the golden blood gushing out of its body no longer able to keep up. However, as its body rammed against the air, the air began to burn, transforming it into a streak of fire.

It smashed into the ground like a meteor.

Only this way could it ensure that its speed was enough for it to hopefully escape that serene and terrifying Daoist.

With a bang, the Angel smashed into the river bank, creating a giant hole.

The massive impact had no effect on it. It immediately stood up, intending to escape to the opposite shore.

Its stronger companion was in the mountain across the river.

But just as it rose, another meteor smashed into that hole in the river bank.

The White Emperor had left the observation platform, dropping from the sky to land a foot on the Angel's chest.

There were countless cracks, like a rock being smashed to pieces by an even harder stone.

The Angel's body struggled a few times as blood poured out of its

mouth and nose. Then it closed its eyes and died.

The White Emperor slowly took his foot away.

He gazed pensively at the Angel's golden blood.

His gaze moved down to the lower part of the Angel's body. He saw only a smooth surface with no distinctive characteristics.

The White Emperor froze and then shook his head.

It's just a bird-person that's neither male nor female.

That's all this so-called Angel is.

.....

.....

The Angel of Sacred Light called Anger's Flame had died.

The most direct reason for its swift death was that when it saw that image of a white tiger in the sky, it had chosen to fight rather than escape.

In that specific moment, its judgment and choice had been correct.

The White Emperor's attention had to be focused on Madam Mu in the clouds. Even if those human experts in the courtyard would be killed, even if his subjects were about to be massacred, he could only use his soul to attack, just like the Tianhai Divine Empress had done during the coup of the Mausoleum of Books.

If the Angel had been able to stop the attack from the White Emperor's soul, even if it was just to buy time, the other Angel would be able to kill Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong, and then turn to join Madam Mu in attacking the White Emperor. When that time came, not even the White Emperor in all his power could be their match.

The problem was that the Angel had not imagined that another supreme expert besides the White Emperor had come to this city

today.

After their descent, they had developed an understanding of all the experts of this continent and knew that there was a particularly formidable Daoist.

In their view, this Daoist could not possibly appear.

But that Daoist had appeared.

And so, it died.

The entire matter was just this simple.

.....

.....

The blue-clothed Daoist landed on the river bank.

The wind ruffled his black hair and blue robe, making him truly seem like a celestial immortal.

A subtle stretch of his hands had torn off the wings of that Angel of Sacred Light.

There was only one such Daoist in this world.

Shang Xingzhou.

Once a middle-aged Daoist of Xining's old temple, he was now the strongest expert of the continent and the ruler of the Human race.

Shang Xingzhou and the White Emperor were old friends, but they did not chat, because the battle had not concluded.

They gazed across the Red River.

Deep within the mountains, a Celestial Tree incessantly swayed. Sword intents could occasionally be glimpsed amidst the raging Qi of the Wildfire.

.....

.....

A storm of swords and several streams of fire.

Chen Changsheng's left hand was gripped around the five Heavenly Tome Monoliths, but he never once used them.

Xu Yourong stood behind him, the Tong Bow at ready, but the Wu Arrow was still nocked.

The Angel felt threatened, but it did not care. The entire situation was under its control and impossible to reverse.

It shuttled through the Celestial Tree as a bolt of lightning as it indifferently looked down on that young man and woman in front of the Celestial Tree.

Suddenly, it stopped, standing atop a thick branch of the Celestial Tree.

Chen Changsheng did not use his sword to send the stone pearls and Xu Yourong did not loose her bow, because they, just like the Angel, had also heard that scream.

That scream that reverberated over White Emperor City and threw all of the Red River into turmoil.

The Angel gazed across the shore, endless shock suddenly appearing in those once-emotionless eyes.

It had clearly sensed the death of its companion, and then the presence of those extremely formidable Qis.

Two wings of white stirred a fierce gale as it immediately prepared to leave.

Just when it was prepared to fly to the northern skies, a tear suddenly appeared in front of it.

This tear expanded with indescribable speed, needing mere seconds to extend ten-some li.

In that tear was not the bottomless abyss, nor was it another world of chaos and turmoil. It was a city.

It was probably that city on the other side of the river.

This city was called White Emperor City.

Outside the city was a river.

The river had a river bank.

A man stood on this river bank.

The White Emperor.

.....

.....

The fissure in the sky did not disappear. A sharp corner of metal protruded from the bottom of the fissure, its surface carved with some sort of complicated inscription.

It had been this piece of metal that had torn open space and mystically connected this space to White Emperor City.

Neither the Angel nor Chen Changsheng knew how this was the case, but Xu Yourong did. In this inn, she had seen this bronze mirror many times and was very familiar with the carvings on it.

Another person also knew of it.

"The Clear Sky Mirror!"

High in the clouds, Madam Mu became somewhat pale, her face even whiter than the surrounding clouds.

A moment ago, when she saw Shang Xingzhou silently appear behind the now-dead Angel, she knew that she had lost.

No matter how meticulously she and Black Robe had planned, they had still ultimately failed.

But in that moment, she still did not understand how Shang Xingzhou had disregarded eighty thousand li of space, instantly traveling from the capital to White Emperor City.

Only when she saw that shard of a bronze mirror tear open the sky did she know the answer.

Probably seventy percent of the Orthodoxy's power rested in Chen Changsheng's hands, as he was the Pope.

But the foundational resources of the Orthodoxy were still with Shang Xingzhou.

.....

.....

The White Emperor did not walk through that spatial tear.

The Clear Sky Mirror was already destroyed, so the fissure its shard could tear in the sky was not very stable, and it was simply impossible for it to endure his powerful Qi.

And even now, the majority of his focus was still high in the clouds, on Madam Mu.

No one understood his wife more than him, so he was exceptionally cautious.

But he still moved.

Just like before, he moved his soul.

The image of the white tiger in the sky tore the sea of clouds to shreds.

His soul entered the Red River, entered that fissure. When it exited, it was in the mountain on the other side.

A divine chant flowed out from the Angel's lips.

A Qi of absolute dignity and a stern will to fight emerged in its eyes.

It was still powerful. If the White Emperor and Shang Xingzhou only used their souls to attack, it could still leave.

The spear formed of light pierced through the leaves and clouds, thrusting toward the White Emperor's soul.

The crackling of invisible flames could be heard as the space between the spear of light and the White Emperor's soul was set

ablaze.

In the blinding light, the White Emperor's soul gradually turned faint.

The Angel remained wary and vigilant, because the White Emperor's expression was also very faint.

.....

.....

When the Clear Sky Mirror tore open the sky, revealing the river bank in the fissure, the White Emperor had been standing alone on the river bank.

And right now, it was still just the White Emperor standing there.

He calmly gazed across the shore, gazing to the western part of the sea of clouds, not moving a single inch.

Shang Xingzhou was no longer by his side.

Blue clothes drifted over the surging great river, riding along the winds.

Shang Xingzhou had personally come.

In an instant, he had surmounted several dozen li of river and mountains, leaving a blur of blue in the sky.

The Celestial Tree swayed as a storm of swords raged within.

Shang Xingzhou acted as if none of it existed, and did not speak to Chen Changsheng as he thrust his right hand into the storm of swords.

Like he was picking flowers or plucking a leaf, he took a sword out of the storm.

Chapter 1036 – [What Buddha Comes Now to Watch the Master Sleep](#)

Chen Changsheng knew what his teacher intended to do, so he naturally did not stop him.

Even if he wanted to stop him, he did not have the ability.

Shang Xingzhou grasped the sword.

This sword had a rather simple and unadorned style, perhaps described as old-fashioned. In the storm of swords, it was very unremarkable.

When Chen Changsheng was bringing out the ten thousand swords from the Garden of Zhou's Sword Pool, he also had not noticed this sword.

Later on, when the Orthodoxy had decided to send the swords back to their old sects, the Li Palace had dispatched extremely qualified and experienced priests to manage the registration for these swords. Still, no one could figure out this sword's background, but since this sword was too unremarkable, nobody cared very much.

Since they could not figure out its background, they naturally did not know where to return it, so this sword had remained at Chen Changsheng's side. In the following battles, this sword had been just like its companions, acting according to his will, becoming a part of the sword array, a drop in the rain of swords.

It remained unremarkable.

Until today, when Shang Xingzhou grasped this sword.

The gloomy confines of this shady world beneath the leaves of the Celestial Tree suddenly brightened as if another sun had appeared.

This sword was the source of the dazzling light.

This sword was a meditation sword of the Buddhist faith.

This sword was called Buddha [Vairocana](#).

The Buddhist faith had gone extinct many ages ago, with neither the Daoist Canon nor secular texts containing any record of it.

Who could still recognize this sword?

In the present-day continent, only three people knew of this sword's background.

Two of them were still probably in a stalemate in the snowy plains to the north of Tianliang County.

Only Shang Xingzhou was present.

With a glance, he had seen this sword in the storm and plucked it out.

Buddhism cultivated the heart, and the meditation sword steadied the heart.

Buddha Vairocana meant to follow one's heart. It was a true sword of the heart.

Xining's temple cultivated precisely the heart.

One could imagine just how terrifying this sword would be in Shang Xingzhou's hands.

The Angel sensed danger. It let out a low thunderous roar, wanting to push away the White Emperor's soul so that it could use all its power to fight.

A blue blur tore through the sky.

It was Shang Xingzhou's Daoist robe.

The White Emperor's soul gradually dispersed.

A golden stream of blood gushed out of the Angel's stomach.

It had been unable to avoid Shang Xingzhou's sword and its body had been run through.

This sword arose from the void and struck with absolute resolve.

Who could avoid it?

.....

.....

The mountains were deathly still.

The Angel lowered its head to the hole in its stomach, a pained expression on its face.

The golden blood continuously dripping down produced many phenomena.

Grass began to sprout from the ground soaked with blood, along with holy flowers of white.

Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong were not too elated. On the contrary, their bodies felt rather cold.

They had seen that sword.

That sword was far too frightening.

Or perhaps Shang Xingzhou was the frightening one.

His sword had traveled completely according to his heart. His will was as unfathomable as the heavens.

Who could avoid this sword?

Even if Chen Changsheng harmonized swords with Xu Yourong, all they would be able to do against such an attack would be accepting death.

The chill they felt did not merely arise because of this conclusion, but because Shang Xingzhou was currently gazing at Chen Changsheng.

Yes, Shang Xingzhou was now ignoring that Angel, not even giving it a glance.

Wielding the Buddha Vairocana Sword, he quietly gazed at Chen

Changsheng.

No one knew what he was thinking or what he intended to do.

But one could be sure that, in Shang Xingzhou's view, this heavily wounded Angel was no longer a threat.

So if one looked across the Red River, who presented the most dangerous threat?

The events over the last few years were proof of the conclusion.

Countless waves appeared on the vast surface of the Red River.

The White Emperor did not come over, but he drew back his gaze from the western sky and gave the opposite shore a profound gaze.

His eyes were completely white, making him seem somewhat fiendish, and extremely like the coldest and fiercest blizzard.

Shang Xingzhou turned away from Chen Changsheng.

Separated by the surging river, the two strongest Saints of the current age on this continent stared at each other.

For a moment, turbid waves beat against the sky, chill winds roared, and the clouds roiled.

The situation had changed too suddenly.

A moment ago, Shang Xingzhou and the White Emperor were working together to kill one Angel and heavily wound the other.

In the next, they entered a standoff.

But why had Shang Xingzhou glanced at Chen Changsheng?

Was it for a more profound reason?

Chen Changsheng did not understand, nor did he continue to think about it.

Although that Angel had been run through by Shang Xingzhou's sword, it had not been completely robbed of the ability to fight.

If it were allowed to leave alive, a future human expedition to the

north would assuredly meet a monstrous opponent.

Perhaps Shang Xingzhou's sword would be running through his chest next, but he still wanted to stop this from happening.

But Xu Yourong snatched onto his sleeve.

The Angel flapped its wings, transforming into a stream of light heading north.

Chen Changsheng knew that he was too late.

Shang Xingzhou and the White Emperor were still in a standoff.

The only person present who could chase after the Angel was Xu Yourong.

The Angel was already severely wounded and so was probably not her match.

But if she left, what would happen to Chen Changsheng?

Even if they combined swords, they were still not necessarily a match for Shang Xingzhou, but it was still better than facing him alone.

Chen Changsheng turned to Xu Yourong and said, "The White Emperor will not let me die."

Xu Yourong replied, "Neither will I."

Shang Xingzhou gazed across the river at the White Emperor, a subtle smile appearing on his face. And then he spoke.

"Zhusha, kill it."

The White Emperor's expression shifted.

Chen Changsheng was flabbergasted.

A black-clothed girl walked out from the hollow of the Celestial Tree.

At some point, the chain that had connected her to the entire mountain had been removed.

Chen Changsheng now understood why he had found this mountain somewhat familiar.

He turned to Xu Yourong.

Xu Yourong smiled.

And then he understood even more.

He understood why she had been so calm when the Angel had forced them into such desperate straits.

He understood why she had said that he should have at least told his plans to a certain person.

And he understood the current situation.

Shang Xingzhou had laid this trap for the purpose of killing the two Angels of Sacred Light.

For various reasons, the White Emperor did not want to let him kill the last Angel.

Of course, he also did not want Chen Changsheng to die.

And so, Shang Xingzhou and the White Emperor abruptly went from comrades to opponents.

But the White Emperor had not expected that Shang Xingzhou had already arranged for someone to send off the Angel for the last time.

As for... whether or not Shang Xingzhou wanted to kill him...

It was fine to not think about this question.

The little Black Dragon turned to Chen Changsheng.

Although it was Shang Xingzhou that had saved her, she still only listened to Chen Changsheng's orders.

Because she was his Protector.

Shang Xingzhou said nothing, appearing very calm.

But he understood his student and knew what Chen Changsheng

would choose.

Without hesitation, Chen Changsheng said, "Go."

Winds howled and leaves flew in disarray as the black-clothed girl vanished.

High in the skies, the heavily injured Angel had just made its way around the fissure torn in the air by the Clear Sky Mirror and was now turning north.

Suddenly, it saw a black mountain range, ten-some li long.

It was like the Starfall Mountains had suddenly come up from the earth to the heavens.

This is the last line from a poem called '题支山南峰僧' by the Tang Dynasty poet Pi Rixiu. As far as I can tell, the poem is praising a monk, whose devotion and virtue seems to make the creatures in the mountain he resides on become Buddhist as well. The poet then proposes to the reader that instead of going to see the sights of a city, why not come to this mountain to see this venerable monk. In this case, however, I believe that Mao Ni is playing with the words 何如来. 何如 means 'why not', so 何如来 means 'why not come'. 如来, however, is the Chinese translation of the word 'tathagata', a term that the Buddha often used to refer to himself, which makes the line 何如来 read as 'what Buddha'.

In Chinese, Vairocana is translated as 大日, or 'Great Sun'.

Chapter 1037 – The Warmth After Death

In the extremely far reaches of the Southern Sea, a stream of light suddenly stopped and the Angel of Sacred Light appeared.

Its body had been run through by the Buddha Vairocana Sword, inflicting upon it severe injuries that not even its divine blood could repair.

It had to return to Xuelao City as quickly as possible, where it could receive the sustenance of the sacrificial altar.

But a black mountain range had appeared in the northern skies and blocked its path.

Afterward, no matter what direction it chose, it could not make its way around the black mountain range.

The mountain range could move, as it was a Black Frost Dragon.

Even in the Sacred Light Continent or in that prehistoric world of light, the Black Frost Dragon had been one of the noblest and rarest of creatures.

But this Black Frost Dragon was still immature. Usually, the Angel might have been wary, but it would never have retreated without a fight.

However, its injuries were too severe. Only by relying on the speed of its wings could it guarantee that it was not caught, but it did not dare to act lightly.

It was just that after so long, its injuries had gradually worsened. The moment had finally arrived where it had to fight to the death.

The sun shone over the mirror-like surface of the sea. The mists rising from the sea were somewhat stuffy and hot.

The Angel turned to face the horizon.

A black line swiftly approached and then came to a sudden halt.

Accompanied by a fierce dragon cry, the black-clothed girl walked on the air toward it.

The languages of the Divine race and the Dragon race were very similar, so the Angel could understand her meaning.

"My injuries truly are very severe, but I still have the strength to kill you."

The Angel's face was abnormally pale, practically transparent, yet its expression was extremely solemn and majestic.

It used its extremely complicated language to intone, "In this sea so far from the continent, there will be no one who can help you."

At the very start, it had attempted to travel through the snowy mountains to return to the land of demons. It had traveled through the center of the continent for quite some time, even managing to avoid the little Black Dragon's barriers several times. However, at the final pass, it had chosen to give up, because it had sensed that several extremely powerful Qis were waiting for it on the path ahead.

One of these Qis was like the sun, another like an ancient well, and one was like a blade.

It was clear that the human experts were waiting at various places on the continent to kill it.

The Angel did not dare take such a risk. It left the continent, traveling far into the Southern Sea.

'Fight to the death' was really just seeking life in death.

That Daoist and the white-clothed girl had more important matters to handle in White Emperor City, like the fate of that young man.

As long as it could kill this Black Frost Dragon, no one else on the continent could keep up with its speed.

When the time came, as long as it chose a good route, avoiding

those human experts around the continent, it was highly likely to return to Xuelao City.

A divine chant flowed out from the Angel's thin lips.

Its expression became even more solemn, extremely majestic, and incomparably pious.

Its Qi became much stronger.

It placed all its hope and glory on this coming battle.

.....

.....

The little Black Dragon did not have a very solemn expression. It could not even be considered serious.

Seeing the Angel continuing to increase its strength, she did not seem at all like she was facing a powerful foe. On the contrary, she looked at the Angel like it was an idiot.

She suddenly remembered something her father had told her many, many years ago.

"Those Angels, their pride makes them stupid. It's best to kill them."

Yes, Father.

These Angels are just as stupid as Father said they were.

The little Black Dragon felt a tinge of sorrow.

Between the blue skies and waters, there was no wind, no sound.

Suddenly, the water began to move, incessantly sloshing as if it was coming to boil.

Several dozen islands, big and small, slowly rose from the sea.

Lying on those islands, in a variety of shapes and sizes... were dragons.

This place was the Dragon Isles, where all the dragons in this

world resided.

The sun was at its zenith right now, precisely the time when the dragons sunbathed.

Several dozen dragon cries rose up, some of them dignified, some of them cruel, and some of them frivolous.

Several dozen mountainous dragons covered the sky, blocking out the sunlight.

Several dozen dragon breaths, some very strong and others very weak, fell on the Angel's body.

The Angel was quiet for a while, then put down the spear of light in its hands.

It dropped to the sea, sinking down into the inky depths.

Its eyes were open as it stared at the sun above.

It did not feel cold or fear. On the contrary, it felt somewhat warm.

.....

.....

The waters of the Southern Sea were warm because the clouds were few and the sunlight scorching.

The waters of the Red River were not cold because of the small amounts of Wildfire leaking out from beneath the Celestial Tree through cracks in the rocks.

There was a great deal of Wildfire leaking out today, so the waters were warmer. The red aquatic grass ecstatically grew, quickly dying the river even redder.

Normally, the Jings, who fed on this grass, would be happily feasting, even using their wide and flat tails to slap the surface of the river, producing breathtaking sights.

But these rather intelligent beings had long since hidden

themselves at the bottom of the river, not even daring to raise their heads.

The river was so calm that it appeared like a red belt.

The two shores were deserted.

But White Emperor City was in an uproar.

This was especially the case for the courtyard in the western part of the city, neighboring the Xiang clan estate, where it was so crowded that the people were a dense mass.

The buildings in the courtyard had completely collapsed. Beams and bricks were strewn everywhere, all of it covered in yellow sand. The place looked like it had been abandoned for decades.

The Li Palace's grand array had been broken and the Angel of Sacred Light killed, but the priests surrounding the courtyard had not departed.

Linghai Zhiwang and the other Prefects remained standing guard by the gate, despite their injuries.

The pale-faced Tang Thirty-Six had to rely on the help of the cosmetic-buying girl in order to stand.

They did not leave because the Demon Lord was still within.

But they also could not enter, because the entire courtyard had been surrounded by the Red River Beast Guard.

Xiaode, the Shi clan leader, and ten-some demi-human experts were standing in front of the gate.

The two sides were in a silent stalemate.

A few voices suddenly came from behind.

The Orthodoxy priests parted like a tide.

Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong walked over.

Several hundred swords flew through the air, forming a sword array in the sky.

Xiaode had no intention of backing down.

He looked at Chen Changsheng and said, "This is His Majesty's will. Please forgive me."

.....

.....

The meadow surrounding Heavensguard Pavilion remained green and tender through the nurturing of the river waters.

The stones on the street were still wet from the mists and shone with an oily luster.

The White Emperor gazed at the activity around that distant courtyard. As he gazed at that rain of swords in the sky, a hint of admiration appeared in his eyes.

Chen Changsheng's cultivation of the sword was even more formidable than had been rumored.

Shang Xingzhou walked to his side and said, "No one can stop me from killing a person that I want to kill, and you are no exception."

He was not speaking of Chen Changsheng here, but the Demon Lord.

To him, killing the two Angels of Sacred Light was just the most basic goal.

If he could kill the Demon Lord as well, then the humans could be considered to have gained a complete victory.

The White Emperor was even willing to leave the final Angel a path of survival, so the Demon Lord need not even be mentioned.

So he asked Shang Xingzhou a question.

"When you die, which of your students will lead the Human race?"

Chapter 1038 – In White Emperor City, Clouds Rush Out the Gate (I)

The important part of the White Emperor's question was not in 'Which of your students will lead the Human race', but in 'When you die'.

The White Emperor was not interested in using Chen Changsheng and Yu Ren to provoke Shang Xingzhou.

He had frankly, nakedly, revealed his bottom line to Shang Xingzhou.

If Shang Xingzhou insisted on killing the Demon Lord, then Shang Xingzhou would come away from today with heavy injuries, or perhaps not walk away at all.

This naturally led to the question of which of his students the Human race would be passed to.

Why had the White Emperor so confidently asked this question?

Shang Xingzhou understood. Everything arose from the still-unmentioned Madam Mu.

She had been standing high in the clouds the entire time with no intention of leaving.

No matter how one looked at it, the betrayed White Emperor could not possibly forgive Madam Mu.

But Shang Xingzhou knew that the White Emperor could change his stance at any time, even if he would feel disgusted when doing it.

"Some people will live, and some people will die."

Shang Xingzhou stared into the White Emperor's eyes as he spoke.

The gray cobblestones cracked as a wave of Qi emerged from the

street and knocked over a row of houses.

Countless gazes looked over. They saw Shang Xingzhou, but they did not see the White Emperor.

The White Emperor arrived high in the clouds.

He quietly stood across from Madam Mu.

"You've finished negotiating with Shang?"

Madam Mu seemed like she was asking about a very ordinary and trifling matter.

The White Emperor's answer was also very casual. "The Demon Lord will live."

Madam Mu looked to the west. "At times, I also wonder about how all this began."

"Perhaps it's because you've always loved your homeland? Everything originates from one's own choices, like the choice you made three years ago."

The White Emperor added, "I didn't expect that in this play of husband and wife, you really did intend on putting me in my grave."

Madam Mu indifferently said, "In my entire life, I have never met anyone more hypocritical than you. At this time, you still say these sorts of things."

The White Emperor smiled. "Did you not use the strength of the seas to seal me into my palace mausoleum?"

Madam Mu turned and looked into his eyes. "Did you not choose yourself the place of your seclusion?"

The White Emperor did not answer, instead asking, "When did you confirm that I was still alive?"

Madam Mu replied, "On that night Old Xiang went to the Starfall Mountains and came back saying that he had sensed your will."

The White Emperor asked, "Did you not request that he do this?"

Madam Mu answered, "This is about Luoheng's marriage. Even if I requested it of him, he would not dare agree without your approval."

"I don't understand what you mean."

The White Emperor continued, "If I remember correctly, he should have defected to your side two years ago."

Madam Mu jeered, "If my guess is right, this is something that you should have arranged for him to do three years ago."

Countless years ago, the entire continent believed that the White Emperor and Madam Mu deeply loved each other, a Saint husband and wife envied across the world.

No one could have expected that they had never trusted each other. It was a normal thing for husband to deceive wife, wife to trick husband.

The White Emperor asked, "Why did you doubt him?"

Madam Mu derided, "Anyone with eyes could see that he was your loyal dog, your most fervent believer."

Perhaps because he had thought of the mountainous figure collapsing in front of the Imperial City, the White Emperor did not respond for a very long time.

A bystander might think that he was reminiscing, grieving, or criticizing himself.

But in Madam Mu's view, this was a shameless and nauseating affectation of sympathy.

"There's no need for you to fake your mood. For the last two hundred years, you've wanted nothing more than to kill this most prestigious and most senior elder, to eliminate the Xiang clan that he was a member of. But since he and his clan were far too loyal, you could never find an appropriate excuse or reason. This time,

you finally managed to use his loyalty to conveniently stain his name, so you would naturally kill him as quickly as possible."

The derision on Madam Mu's face grew deeper and deeper. "Now that I think about, you and that old friend of yours, Shang Xingzhou, are really very similar, both hypocritical to the extreme. He wants to kill his own student, but he also doesn't want to dirty his own hands, so he wanted to borrow mine. And you are just the same."

The White Emperor's expression did not change. "Since you knew that I was still alive, why did you not stop me from coming out?"

"If you wanted to come out, you would naturally come out. If you didn't want to come out, then it meant that you wanted to continue watching the play."

Madam Mu impassively said, "We've been husband and wife for so many years, so we have at least a little tacit understanding. When you were never willing to come out, it meant that you silently agreed to my plan, that you wanted to watch me and Black Robe do these things. The only thing I don't understand is why you stopped me from moving against Chen Changsheng."

It was now obvious that the incomprehensible energy that had put Chen Changsheng on edge had come from the White Emperor.

And it was only this way that the White Emperor could alter the stance of the entire Demi-human race overnight without showing himself.

Madam Mu did not need the White Emperor to answer this question, as she managed to quickly derive it for herself.

"Presumably, it's because you knew that Shang Xingzhou could appear at any time."

The White Emperor said, "Correct. In the end, I still underestimated my old friend's daring and methods. I didn't

expect that he would invite Xu Yourong to assist him."

"No one is willing to stand on the stage and judge life and death, but you sit in the audience, tasting tea."

Madam Mu sneered at him. "I didn't want to let you keep watching the play, nor did Shang Xingzhou. Everyone wanted you to step on stage and give us a song."

The White Emperor said, "I also underestimated Chen Changsheng's resolve and persistence."

Madam Mu recalled that figure moving between the Imperial City and the Starfall Mountains, and shook her head.

She also had not expected that Chen Changsheng had the ability, as well as such an admirable patience, to use his sword array to grind away at the seal.

From that moment, the White Emperor could no longer play the part of the suffering sovereign, imprisoned from the world.

All the conflicts exploded from that moment, the beginning of all stories. All the roles put on their makeup and stepped on stage.

This was what was meant by seeing all living things.

Madam Mu taunted, "Even though you ended up being pushed out like a clown by that master and disciple, I won't sympathize with you."

The White Emperor calmly replied, "I do not require sympathy."

"Then what about him?"

Madam Mu lightly caressed her belly as she looked at the White Emperor. "Does your son need sympathy?"

A little life that still had not been able to see the world, see all living beings; only one who could not see these things required sympathy.

That is to say, it had come to a premature end.

The White Emperor's gaze fell on Madam Mu's belly.

Madam Mu's belly was very flat.

"It is not easy to pass on the bloodline of my White Emperor clan. Pregnancy requires five years, and getting a son could even be considered challenging."

The White Emperor calmly gazed at her as he added, "But we already have Luoluo."

Madam Mu stared into his eyes. "But in the end, she is just a daughter."

"This is your greatest mistake. I've never felt there to be any difference between a daughter and son, so I've naturally never thought about getting a son. I've never understood where this viewpoint of you people from the Great Western Continent came from."

The expression on the White Emperor's face became more and more derisive, his tone increasingly harsh.

"Because daughters must be married off and can't assist the parents in one's old age, or is it because women are extroverted? But you've been married off to my White Emperor City for so many years, and you've always been thinking about your parents' clan. You've never treated this place as your home, never treated me as a part of your family. This being the case, what are you worried about?"

This title is a line from a poem by the Tang Dynasty poet Du Fu, the title of which is simply 'White Emperor City'. It refers to the actual White Emperor City, usually known as Baidicheng, where Du Fu resided for several years. The city, actually a temple complex, was often shrouded in mists, hence the clouds rushing out of its gates. However, it should be noted that the White Emperor called Madam Mu 'Yun'er', which means 'Little Cloud', so you can also interpret this title as 'In White Emperor City, Madam

Mu leaves'.

Chapter 1039 – In White Emperor City, Clouds Rush Out the Gate (II)

Madam Mu was quiet for a very long time, not answering the White Emperor's questions.

She did not know how to answer.

No matter how harsh and derisive the White Emperor's words were, no matter how much they displeased her, upon careful thought, she truly found it impossible to respond to them.

This fact made her recall all the many facts from the last few years.

Suddenly, she felt like these last few years and all these matters were somewhat absurd.

The distant figure of a lonely sail on the Western Sea... How could she bear to turn and look at her mother country?

But starting from many years ago, she had grown used to thinking about problems in this way, doing things in this way.

It truly had been many years.

She sighed. "You've probably been holding these words for many years."

The White Emperor thought this over, then answered, "It's fine, because you weren't so obvious before, and our daughter was only ten-some years old."

"So that's how it was."

A hint of loneliness appeared in Madam Mu's eyes.

There were still many things that had been left unsaid, and though there was still time to say them, there was not much meaning in it.

Home was where the heart found peace, so why had her heart

never been able to find peace? Why had she not left just now but instead waited to have this conversation with the White Emperor?

Countless clouds rushed toward that blue gown in the sky.

In a very short time, they formed an extremely thick sea of clouds in which white waves were born and died.

It was like all the clouds in the world had gathered over White Emperor City.

'All' truly did mean 'all'.

There were the cold clouds that had hung over the snowcapped peaks of the Starfall Mountains, and there were rain clouds from the Western Sea.

There was also the fog that lingered by the streams, and the icy wisps over the snowy plains. Even clouds from the distant Cloud Grave in the east began to drift toward her.

The sea of clouds grew thicker and thicker, wider and wider, eventually engulfing a part of the sky a hundred-some li in radius.

The clouds had originally been white, but as they increased in number, light could no longer penetrate them. They became gray, then black.

Looking up from the ground, the sea of clouds in the sky became a sea of ink.

The sun was obscured by the clouds, causing the world below to get dimmer and dimmer, until finally, it became impossible to see anything clearly.

The dark night had come early.

Frightened shouts rose from all over White Emperor City.

The demi-human populace either fled in all directions or stood dazed on the streets, staring at the inky sea of clouds.

Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong glanced at each other and

then up to the sky.

Tang Thirty-Six looked up to the sky.

Xiaode, the Shi clan leader, and the other great demi-humans all looked up to the sky.

Had this battle between Saints begun?

In the fractured street, Shang Xingzhou also looked up at the sky, an indifferent expression on his face, his thoughts inscrutable.

Crack!

A massive bolt of lightning, as thick as a Celestial Tree, tore open the sea of clouds, illuminating the entire world before vanishing in midair.

In that instant, a several-li radius of clouds in that inky sea was painted white.

Many more bolts of lightning followed. The majority were extinguished before breaking through the clouds, and the occasional ones that could were unable to reach the ground.

This lightning came from above. One could imagine how mighty they were from how they were able to tear through the layer of clouds, which was several dozen li thick.

Massive booms of thunder reached the ground, bringing with them fierce gales that began to devastate the city.

The seal of the Red River sensed this and activated on its own, forming a massive dome of blue light that covered the Imperial City, Heavensguard Pavilion, and all of the upper city within it. However, it could not stop those gales from toppling the crude residences of the lower city, leading to injuries among many of its denizens.

Massive waves emerged from the sea of clouds as the lightning tore away at it. Occasionally, in a spectacular sight, a wisp of cloud like a tongue of flame would spit down.

Those lightning bolts would occasionally illuminate the world below the clouds, but they could not bring any real warmth.

The sun, shut out by the thick layer of clouds, could not spread its warmth to the earth, and so White Emperor City's temperature rapidly dropped.

The moisture in the clouds had no time to condense into water drops. It turned straight into snowflakes that dropped down from the sky.

Those wisps torn out of the sea by the lightning bolts were like scattered dandelions, shedding unimaginable amounts of snow.

This was an extremely rare blizzard.

Those people who had fled in fear or had homes to hide in had already left.

Those who remained on the streets naturally would not leave now.

They stood in the blizzard, gazing up at the sky.

Unfortunately, though their gazes could see through the snow, they could not see through the thick clouds to find out what was going on.

There was a fwoosh as Chen Changsheng opened the Yellow Paper Umbrella.

Tang Thirty-Six was prepared to walk under it, but then he realized that Chen Changsheng had walked to Xu Yourong's side.

The cosmetic-buying young girl called out to her young master and raised an umbrella over his head.

An Lin was in the process of treating the wounds of Linghai Zhiwang and the others. She would occasionally raise her head to glance at the sky.

All was quiet around the courtyard.

White Emperor City was also very quiet.

The only sound was the turmoil in the sea of clouds, the tearing that spilled snow over the earth.

The entire world shifted between black and white, but not once did it turn gray.

The heavens and earth seemed to have become one.

An extremely thick lightning bolt descended far in the west.

The peak of some obscure mountain had been leveled.

The stream outside the courtyard was frozen and ceased to gurgle.

The thunder did not stop, the snow did not cease.

.....

.....

After some time, a fracture finally appeared in the middle of the sea of clouds, and the clouds began to scatter.

Sunlight peeked in through that crack, which grew wider and wider, eventually enveloping all of White Emperor City.

The sea of clouds began to disperse, shedding countless wispy snow-carrying clouds.

Those cold clouds descended on the Imperial City, on Heavensguard Pavilion. They flowed down the Stairway to Heaven like a waterfall.

The cloudfall reached the lower city, then exited the city gate, ultimately entering the Red River and leaving nothing behind.

Not a single trace, not in the blue sky above or in White Emperor City below.

Not a single wisp of a cloud was left.

In the stone hall at the highest part of the Imperial City...

Luoluo stood by the window, tears rolling down her face as she gazed at the snow.

The White Emperor returned to that street.

He gazed up at the sky.

There were no more clouds.

But snow was still coming down.

This snow seemed to come from the void.

It had all been so empty.

Shang Xingzhou walked to his side and asked, "How many years have we been friends?"

The White Emperor answered, "Several hundred years."

Shang Xingzhou said, "Back when you chose her, your father objected, I objected, and all the ministers objected."

The White Emperor jeered at himself, "Jin Yulu said the same thing today."

Shang Xingzhou looked at him and asked, "So then what do you think now?"

"Are you asking if I regret it?"

The White Emperor said nothing for a very long time. Finally, he said, "Only you humans and the demons will have such a boring way of thinking."

If it really was such a boring way of thinking, why had he said nothing for so long? Why had he needed to think for so long?

'Only if the mountain is without its peak, and the rivers come to a stop.

'Only if the winter thunders and snow falls like rain.

'Only if the heavens and earth become one.

['Only then would I dare to break with my lord.'](#)

This was the final parting.

[Only parting can bring one overwhelming grief.](#)

And this was the final parting.

But had everything truly come to an end here?

Those dispersing clouds, this still-falling snow, was all her: cold, wet, and soft, making one feel a little angry.

The White Emperor abruptly lowered his head and began to cough.

The above four lines are from a folk song from the Han Dynasty called 上邪. The singer of the song is a woman who is swearing an oath to the heavens that her love to her husband will remain true. Not unless the seemingly impossible events mentioned above happen will she dare to be parted from her husband.

This is the first line in the 'Fu on Parting', the Fu being a type of poetic prose, by Jiang Yan, a poet who lived in the Southern Dynasty. As can be expected from the title of the Fu, it describes the various sorrowful circumstances of parting.

Chapter 1040 – The Hearts of Emperors Are All Wind and Snow

There were many reasons to cough, with the most common being illness.

Cold air harming the lungs was one of the most lingering illnesses. Even an expert of the Divine Domain would find it very troublesome.

Shang Xingzhou had no idea that the White Emperor would be coughing throughout the following years and months, coughing for many years.

But he did know that the White Emperor had suffered significant injuries, just as he had.

The two Angels of Sacred Light and Madam Mu were extremely powerful opponents.

He and the White Emperor were the strongest of the current era, but they also had to pay a certain price.

That he chose not to exercise all the options available to him at this time was based on this reasoning. It was also because he knew that Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong would not support him. He and the White Emperor could alter their wills according to the situation at any time, but that young couple would not.

He said to the White Emperor, "But, in the end, it still came to this day."

"She was talented, of a good bloodline, capable, extremely intelligent, and also beautiful. By marrying her, I could father the best descendant."

The White Emperor added, "For this, I could endure many things, including her ambition, but I didn't realize that her ambition was so great."

Shang Xingzhou understood what he meant.

If Madam Mu had only plotted to gain a few advantages for the Great Western Continent, the White Emperor would remain silent, but her recent actions had now even involved the fate of the entire Demi-human race.

"In truth, I always knew that she couldn't stand me, that she always felt that I was a monster that didn't understand art."

The White Emperor indifferently said, "None of this matters. I could endure her, but I could not endure like Bie Yanghong. Most importantly, Luoluo was the one I chose to be the next White Emperor. You should also be aware of how pure and formidable her bloodline is. And she wanted to marry her off to Xuelao City just because that's what the Great Western Continent thinks should be done with daughters? She really went crazy."

Shang Xingzhou commented, "In this entire matter, this is the part that I don't understand about you. Your descendant was also in her bosom."

The White Emperor indifferently said, "In the matter of sons and daughters, I've never cared about quantity, only quality. An excellent child like Luoluo is already enough, so what use is there in having more pieces of trash? This is the reason my clan has always been very small since ancient times. Not everyone can be like that emperor of yours, having so many sons and letting them slaughter each other to see which one will survive in the end and claim the throne. What do you consider that? [Raising Gu](#)? There are times when I really don't know what to say about your Human race."

The emperor he was referring to was naturally the mighty Emperor Taizong.

Shang Xingzhou said, "This being the case, why do all this?"

"Back in the snowy plains to the north of Mount Han, you

borrowed my hands to heavily wound the Demon Lord, and also delayed me for five years."

The White Emperor gave Shang Xingzhou a deep stare.

"These five years were enough for you to do too many things. You unexpectedly managed to seize back the rule of the Human race from Tianhai's hands... I was forced to ponder a problem. If Xuelao City is destroyed and you unite the world, where will my race go? So I could only strive to slow your pace."

Shang Xingzhou calmly said, "I am not His Majesty Taizong. I do not have the ability to defy the heavens and change fate. All of you have overestimated me."

The White Emperor replied, "You are my friend, so I know how frightening you are. And you even managed to raise two excellent students."

Shang Xingzhou did not respond to this comment. "So you made this plan?"

He was still referring to his previous question.

'Why do all this?'

He was talking about everything that had occurred.

This was the White Emperor's city.

Everything that happened in this city had all obtained his agreement, or tacit approval, or even secret promotion.

Whether it was Madam Mu's deeds or the Xiang clan elder's deeds, whether they were for good or ill.

Like the Heavenly Selection, or the dangers that Chen Changsheng had faced, or this plan, or the deaths of Bie Yanghong and Wuqiong Bi, or that most important of matters.

The White Emperor would not agree to marry Luoluo off to Xuelao City, but this did not mean that he had not initially considered allying with the demons.

"You used your daughter as a betting chip to make both sides fight while you watched from the sidelines. No matter what the result was, you would come out in the end to mount the stage and shout, bringing everything to a perfect close."

Shang Xingzhou continued, "For people like us that have lived too long, we have far too much time to think, and our schemes naturally won't have many flaws. But you did not expect Chen Changsheng to arrive so early, altering the course of the situation, and you also did not expect him to be so obsessed with digging you out of that mountain."

The White Emperor said, "As I said, you raised two excellent students. And besides, you also came."

Shang Xingzhou said, "For such a major event, I had to personally step on stage."

The White Emperor knew that the 'major event' did not merely refer to the Demi-human race's intention to ally with Xuelao City, but more to those two Angels of Sacred Light.

To individuals like him and Shang Xingzhou, who dwelled at the peak of the continent, the only truly major events were events beyond this world.

They all walked the path of the Great Dao, and their Dao was this side's Dao.

To use Wang Zhice's words, positions were relative, so it was only natural that their standpoints be foreordained from their birth.

The actions of the demons had already touched their bottom line.

"It probably has nothing to do with the Demon Lord."

The White Emperor determined, "Only people as mad as her and Black Robe would do something like this."

Shang Xingzhou said, "Women are all crazy, so you can't let them

stand too high."

He had opposed the marriage of the White Emperor and Madam Mu many years ago on the basis of this reasoning.

Similarly, he thought the same of the Tianhai Divine Empress.

"So I cannot understand why you were willing to request Xu Yourong's assistance."

The White Emperor said, "She's a woman, and she's also your student's fiancée."

Shang Xingzhou replied, "Defeating you is an extremely difficult task."

"Yes, in the end, I still lost to you and your student."

The White Emperor added, "This convinces me of the soundness of that statement."

He was naturally referring to that statement circulating around the continent.

'A temple of Xining rules the world.'

'Rule' could mean 'govern', but it could also mean 'conquer'.

If Shang Xingzhou combined forces with his two students, they could conquer all who did not accept their rule.

"If I remember correctly, it was you who said this, right before you entered seclusion."

"Correct."

"I have never conceded."

Shang Xingzhou calmly said, "So after I exterminate the demons, how do you plan to deal with me?"

"In the past I truly was very worried, but I feel a little better now, because before you can visit White Emperor City again, you have to defeat that excellent student of yours."

The White Emperor commented, "I've discovered that that student of yours is even better than I imagined. For you to beat him will truly be very difficult."

Just like Shang Xingzhou said, for individuals like them who had spent too long soaking in the river of time, as long as they calculated, their plans would be without flaw.

Luoluo would become the next White Emperor, so as long as Chen Changsheng reigned over the world, the safety of the demi-humans would be assured, no matter how much the humans flourished.

Madam Mu had once said to Luoluo that the relationship between teacher and student was not so firm and that she would only feel at ease if Chen Changsheng was willing to marry Luoluo.

The White Emperor did not think so. He was almost certain that it was precisely because Chen Changsheng could not marry Luoluo that he would treat her even better.

This was not an inability to fulfill one's desires. Rather it was an incomparably intense desire to protect that resulted from a fusion of apology and the joy of being adored and loved.

Of course, these plans were founded on the idea that Chen Changsheng would not be killed or lose out to Shang Xingzhou.

"You view that student of mine who can't grow up to be useful so optimistically?"

This was the first time in this conversation that Shang Xingzhou admitted that Chen Changsheng was his student.

"In truth, it all originates from your attitude to him."

The White Emperor calmly said, "If you did not so highly regard him, how could this world have so highly regarded him at the start?"

Shang Xingzhou asked, "And if this high regard did not have the

meaning that all of you believed it to have?"

The White Emperor said, "We can talk about it when the time comes. And besides, if someone can promise me even more in the future, I'll naturally change my mind."

Shang Xingzhou said no more. Turning, he left the street.

Chen Changsheng had been watching on the side this entire time.

He said nothing as he watched Shang Xingzhou mix into the crowd.

On the Divine Path of the Mausoleum of Books, he was carrying the Tianhai Divine Empress's body down and Shang Xingzhou was coming up. They had passed each other, not saying a single word, not giving a single glance.

At the time, he had not said anything, nor had he mentioned this matter in the future, but in truth, he had found the emotions from that time somewhat impossible to bear.

Today, Shang Xingzhou had glanced at him twice, but he still felt the same.

Shang Xingzhou's gaze was no different from the way one looked at a stranger.

Two hands fell on Chen Changsheng's shoulders.

Not to burden him, but to comfort him.

Chen Changsheng looked at Tang Thirty-Six and smiled, then he turned to Xu Yourong and said, "I'm fine."

.....

.....

Winter on the snowy plains was as cold as the abyss. The air exhaled by demon beasts was quickly frozen into crystals.

The wind was fierce and devoid of warmth.

Black Robe calmly gazed to the west, then said suddenly, "We

lost."

Upon hearing these words, the gigantic Mountain-toppling Fiend nearby let out a painful roar. It was not because the Mountain-toppling Fiend could understand his words and knew that the most important scheme of the Demon race in the last few years had failed, but because the Demon Commander on its head had angrily snapped off a part of its horn.

Behind Black Robe and the Demon Commander were ten-some Demon Generals, and even farther behind were several massive and enigmatic figures, shrouded in black mists.

The demons had not gone to White Emperor City to offer their aid for several reasons.

Black Robe believed in the power of the Angels of Sacred Light, believed in his understanding of the situation in the capital, but it was also because there was not enough time.

But the more important reason was a person.

A middle-aged scholar stood in the snow.

It was the most famous scholar in the world since the dawn of history.

Wang Zhice.

"I didn't expect that he would even manage to get you to move. Now that I think about it, that you were able to escape little boy Jiexing's murderous intentions back then probably involved no small effort from Daoist Ji."

The gusting winds revealed Black Robe's sickly green cheeks, but his voice remained flat and emotionless.

This name that he had not heard in ages caused Wang Zhice to sigh. "Have several hundred years of wind and snow still not been able to wash away your hatred?"

Gu, 蛊, refers to a particular custom of placing a variety of

poisonous insects into a jar, where they will fight and kill each other. The final survivor was considered to have concentrated the toxins of all the insects killed in its single body, and the highly lethal toxin was extracted from the final insect to be used in assassination.

Chapter 1041 – I See

'Jiexing' was Emperor Taizong's old name in Tianliang County.

Ever since the Heavenly Tome Monoliths descended upon the world, there was no one who could ever surpass this man's status in history.

For this reason, everyone on this continent, whether they were born before or after him, would always pay him the highest honor and respect.

Neither human nor demi-human, nor even those demon dukes in Xuelao City that hated him to the bone, would ever directly address him by his name.

But today, Black Robe had called it out, and he had even called him 'little boy'.

Anyone could hear that his hatred for Emperor Taizong extended straight into the marrow of his bones.

"If time could forget all things of the past, what meaning would there be in our existences?"

Black Robe sneered at Wang Zhice, "You once said that you did not care about worldly affairs, but it looks to me like you still can't let them go."

Wang Zhice said, "Since you collaborated with people from the other race, this is no longer a worldly affair, but an affair that is beyond this world."

Black Robe asked, "And so what?"

Wang Zhice replied, "As long as you are willing to give up on this insane way of thinking, I am willing to do anything for you."

"Anything?"

Black Robe ridiculed, "I've seen your shameless cruelty. Did you think I would be fooled by you another time?"

After saying this, he turned and stalked toward that metropolis deep within the snowstorm.

The Demon Commander and the Demon Generals followed, while those massive figures in the black mists gradually faded away.

Wang Zhice gazed at Black Robe's figure, an extremely complicated expression on his face.

.....

.....

The Demon Lord silently left White Emperor City, the entire process so peaceful that nobody noticed.

There were many human experts that wanted to kill the Demon Lord within the city, but nobody could touch him, as the White Emperor had loudly proclaimed a decree.

This decree was the exact same as Madam Mu's, a word-for-word copy.

'One who has come from afar is a guest.'

Anyone could understand what this meant.

Everything in the world needed to be in equilibrium.

In order to guard against the Human race becoming too strong on its own, the Demon race could not be weakened too much.

The Council of Elders remained silent, as did the Demi-human Court and experts like Xiaode, because this was His Majesty's will. Only Jin Yulu, just like he did several hundred years ago, entered a fierce quarrel with the White Emperor, after which he was driven out of the Imperial City to continue his life tilling the fields.

Chen Changsheng and Tang Thirty-Six stood on the observation platform, looking into the hall.

The sun was extremely bright and the hall was extremely

gloomy. It was difficult to clearly see anything within, only the ministers, generals, and elders prostrating on the ground in a dense wave.

Tang Thirty-Six recalled the bloody battle that had taken place around the courtyard. In a terrible mood, he sneered, "Is that what 'the weak are reasonable' means?"

Chen Changsheng said nothing, only sighed.

It didn't take long for the court to conclude its session.

The ministers, generals, and elders began to file out. From a distance, they respectfully bowed at Chen Changsheng, then dispersed. No one dared to come forward and speak with them, not even the Bear tribe elder or the Shi clan leader. The circumstances today were completely different from the circumstances several nights ago in the Daoist church.

After several years, the White Emperor had finally returned to his city. There was no need for him to attempt any politics or strategy for the entire Demi-human race to unite under his will.

Moreover, the only person that could threaten his status, the Xiang clan leader, had died a violent death, and the Xiang clan itself was very unstable.

Chen Changsheng and Tang Thirty-Six entered the hall.

There was no seat for Chen Changsheng to sit on, but Tang Thirty-Six could not call this disrespectful, as the White Emperor was also not sitting.

"How is your grandfather doing?"

The White Emperor asked Tang Thirty-Six.

No matter how many silent curses he had, Tang Thirty-Six still responded very calmly and appropriately. There was nothing to criticize in either his courtesy or bearing.

But in the end, he still could not help but say a few words.

"I really can't understand why he still loves to stir so many storms, even though he's this old."

He was clearly speaking of the Tang Old Master, but the object of his ridicule was the White Emperor.

The White Emperor ignored him. Turning to Chen Changsheng, he said a few words.

These words had a simple meaning that could easily be imagined.

It was just looking back on the extremely close and excellent relationship between both sides and an expression of hope that it could continue.

Lastly, the White Emperor said, "At Holy Maiden Peak, you and Zhexiu killed that fellow. It was excellent."

This comment ended the conversation.

An attendant led Chen Changsheng and Tang Thirty-Six to Luoluo's residence.

Chen Changsheng continued to ponder those final words.

Tang Thirty-Six explained, "He was speaking of the White Tiger Divine General. That fellow was also incredibly bold to dare call himself 'White Tiger'. If not for the alliance between the two races, he would have been killed by the White Emperor ages ago. It wasn't easy for the White Emperor to act, so he should truly be quite elated to see you kill him."

As they reached that stone hall at the highest point, they saw a figure standing by the railing. Chen Changsheng was somewhat surprised, but he still went into the hall first.

Tang Thirty-Six naturally did not follow, instead walking toward the woman by the railing.

The stone hall was not of crude construction. Round windows and ebony partitions made the space appear very luxurious and beautiful.

Luoluo stood in front of a painting like a lonely white flower in a pot.

Her face was pale and her expression mournful. She looked very pitiful.

It was not merely because of the callousness of her mother and her death, nor was it just because of the parting soon to come. Many other things contributed to this sadness.

Chen Changsheng stood in front of her, remaining quiet for a very long time. Suddenly, he proposed, "Do you want to come with me?"

Luoluo lowered her head, saying nothing.

Drip, drip, drip. Tears splashed against the floor.

After a few moments, she raised her head and wiped the tears off with her sleeve. She revealed a sincere smile and replied, "Teacher, there's no need."

If Chen Changsheng had said 'come with me' instead of 'do you want to come with me', she might have followed him.

The latter was a proposal seeking her opinion. The former was an order.

As a student, how could she defy her teacher's will?

Alas.

She very naturally leaned into Chen Changsheng's chest.

Just like in the past.

Chen Changsheng didn't know where to put his hand.

When he saw the trails of tears on her face, her dazzling smile, and her clear eyes, he thought of many things.

The walls of the Orthodox Academy, pockmarked by rain, the dazzling twilight visible from the great banyan tree, and that clear lake.

His hand fell.

But it was different from the past.

This time, his hand fell on her back.

.....

.....

A long time had passed, but Chen Changsheng had still not come out.

Tang Thirty-Six could not help but look to his side again.

Xu Yourong paid him no attention, and she also did not turn to look into the hall.

This was the highest place in the Imperial City, higher even than the observation platform.

Standing by the rail, she could clearly make out the observation platform.

She knew that a pear tree had once grown there.

She knew how touching the sight of [pear blossoms bathed in rain](#) was.

She had personally witnessed the sight not too long ago.

Just who would not pity that young face drenched in tears?

Tang Thirty-Six finally could suppress himself no longer. "You..."

Xu Yourong impassively said, "Shut your mouth."

Somewhat angry, Tang Thirty-Six said, "I..."

Xu Yourong lightly arched her brows, saying, "Even I cannot help but love her upon seeing her, much less him."

'Pear blossoms bathed in rain' is a Chinese expression that means 'weeping beauty'

Chapter 1042 – Fierce the Cold Winds, Like Good Wine

The three people walked out of the Imperial City.

As they walked past the collapsed Whalefall Platform, Chen Changsheng suddenly stopped.

"Just who did the child in her bosom belong to?"

Upon hearing these words and connecting them to the quiet in the hall and Xu Yourong's reaction, Tang Thirty-Six was deeply shocked and subconsciously prepared to flee.

Xu Yourong glanced at him and said, "You're thinking too much."

Chen Changsheng had also noticed the change in Tang Thirty-Six's expression and helplessly shook his head.

Many people had died in this conflict, including Bie Yanghong, Wuqiong Bi, and the two Angels of Sacred Light.

But the one that Chen Changsheng could not forget was a life that many could not even remember.

It was the child in Madam Mu's womb.

In his view, that child had been the most innocent sacrifice.

Perhaps it was because it made him recall his own background.

Xu Yourong understood where his question came from and explained that offspring of the White Emperor clan needed five years of pregnancy before they could be born.

Chen Changsheng froze. Only now did he understand why Luoluo was so small despite claiming that she was the same age as him.

She had been referring to the age as counted starting from her day of conception.

Outside the Imperial City, the Bear tribe leader, the Shi clan leader, and other demi-human personages were waiting for them.

Outside the White Emperor's gaze, they were very willing to express their kindness to Chen Changsheng and repair their relationship.

However, they were still somewhat fearful. It didn't take long for them to disperse and for the plaza in front of the Imperial City to become deserted.

Chen Changsheng turned his head and saw that little black dot high up on the observation platform. He said nothing.

He naturally knew that this was not the entire truth.

In those nights when he was breaking the array in the Starfall Mountains, he had pondered many things, and faintly begun to understand what was happening.

So when he used the South Stream Temple array to open the seal, that mountain collapsed, and the White Emperor appeared before the world, he had chosen to immediately turn and leave.

He had confirmed for himself that the White Emperor was still alive, but he did not want to see him, much less speak to him.

Because he felt rather nauseated.

The White Emperor had not died, nor was he unconscious.

On that night before the Heavenly Selection ceremony, the Xiang clan leader had gone to the Starfall Mountains. Of course, what he had sensed was the White Emperor's true will.

Madam Mu knew that the Xiang clan leader had faked his defection, and it was also from that night that she began to suspect the White Emperor. But she did not change her mind and continued to advance her plans. She knew the White Emperor too well, so she knew that as long as the White Emperor could remain uninvolved, he would permit her actions.

But no one had expected Chen Changsheng to go to the Starfall Mountains and save the White Emperor.

Those nights spent breaking the array to save someone were actually to force someone.

One was not forced out by wealth or honor, but through persistence and dedication.

Ultimately, the White Emperor was forced out of the mountains by Chen Changsheng.

The method to break the array had been passed from Shang Xingzhou to Xu Yourong to Xiaode, and finally, to him.

After seeing all living beings, the White Emperor would have to make a decision.

From this perspective, he truly had lost to Shang Xingzhou and Chen Changsheng.

Tang Thirty-Six recalled the sight when the Li Palace's grand array was broken, thought of the Demon Lord walking out of the darkness and that Angel in the sky. Still feeling some fear, he said, "Thankfully, all the schemes failed in the end, or else I really don't know how things would end up."

Chen Changsheng said nothing. He did not agree with Tang Thirty-Six's view.

"Who says that the White Emperor really lost? The demons lost two Angels of the Sacred Light and the humans also lost two experts of the Divine Domain. Shang Xingzhou has suffered significant injuries, the Xiang clan leader was unjustly killed, the Xiang clan destroyed, and the Council of Elders severely weakened. For the next two hundred years, no one will dare to threaten him, and the relationship between Chen Changsheng and Luoluo is indestructible. Once she inherits the throne, the demi-humans won't have to worry about any threats from the humans. For so many benefits, all he had to pay was the life of his wife."

Xu Yourong slightly paused, then added, "And he didn't even love her."

Tang Thirty-Six suddenly felt like the wind was getting colder.

Then he realized that they had already exited the city gate and were at the ferry by the shore.

Xuanyuan Po, the Tang clan's people, and the Orthodoxy's priests had been waiting here for them for a very long time.

The cold winds howling from the river made the breath of every person a pillar of frost. It was a somewhat spectacular scene.

After the heavy snowfall stopped, the temperature of White Emperor City had failed to rise.

The wind was coming from the direction of the river, but it was really coming from across the mountains, from the Western Sea.

The west wind was as cold as an icy knife, but as it cut across their faces, it made them red and hot, as if they had drunk the strongest wine.

Chen Changsheng turned to look at the Imperial City. He thought of the last few days, thought of the people in this story, thought of the White Emperor and Madam Mu.

"Will we really become people like this?"

On the shore of the Orthodox Academy's lake and weeks ago by the banks of the Wenshui, he had asked this question.

In the past, Tang Thirty-Six would have given a very clear answer, but he was quiet today.

Chen Changsheng thought of Bie Yanghong and Wuqiong Bi, and recalled another important question.

"If your wife treated you extremely well but had a poor personality, or was an evil and wicked person, what would you do?"

This had been Bie Yanghong's question.

Xuanyuan Po recalled those days and his expression darkened.

Xu Yourong calmly gazed at him and asked, "If it were you, what would you do?"

Chen Changsheng very earnestly pondered the question, then replied, "I would advise and stop you from committing evil, spending my entire life standing guard at your side."

Tang Thirty-Six asked, "Just like Bie Yanghong?"

Chen Changsheng considered this, then shook his head. "I can't do it."

Xu Yourong replied, "And I don't want it."

Tang Thirty-Six asked, "And if you encounter this problem?"

Xu Yourong thought for a while, then replied, "I would kill him, then follow him in death."

This answer, especially the casual way in which she spoke, scared Xuanyuan Po so badly that the words he had been preparing to say were rammed back down his throat.

"You really are a child raised by the Divine Empress."

Tang Thirty-Six felt somewhat sorrowful, then he quickly changed the subject. "I feel like there's a problem with your brains."

Surprised, Chen Changsheng asked, "What do you think should be done?"

"You all say that I'm like Su Li, and my way of doing things is naturally in that style as well."

Tang Thirty-Six said, "What can you do? Don't do anything. Isn't it quite pleasant to be big villains together?"

Chen Changsheng felt that these words were inappropriate. Just when he was preparing to say something, he was interrupted by a

burst of ritual music.

It was very happy music, and it was even interspersed with a firework or two. It was probably some family's happy occasion.

After so many events and Madam Mu's recent death, a family that dared to hold such a happy occasion was either extremely dumb or had incredibly deep backing.

The family holding today's joyous event belonged to neither of these categories.

The reason no one stopped them was that this family was holding a marriage, and the one officiating the marriage was rather special.

Xuanyuan Po said to Tang Thirty-Six, "Principal was originally invited to preside over the marriage, but now I'm serving as his substitute."

Chen Changsheng explained, "I have to quickly leave."

The Archbishop of the Western Wastes and several cardinals stepped forward to bid farewell, as they intended to take part in the marriage.

This sort of display puzzled Tang Thirty-Six even more, making him wonder, just what's going on here?

Xuanyuan Po explained to him the story.

The people getting married were a young man and woman who had gone to the front of the Imperial City several days ago to see the Heavenly Selection ceremony.

The young man was a Bear tribe laborer of the lower city who lived in the Pine Paths. The young woman was a noble lady of the upper city.

Logically speaking, such a massive difference in status would have made it impossible for them to even know each other, much less marry.

But on that day, Chen Changsheng and the Demon Lord engaged

in a fierce battle on the observation platform, its effects causing a massive piece of rock to break off from the Whalefall Platform.

At the final moment, the Bear tribe laborer had protected the noble lady.

Even so, they still would have died, just like the several hundred others on the plaza who could not have escaped in time.

Fortunately, the assault of Chen Changsheng's swords had rendered that massive boulder into powder, dropping a beautiful snow in front of the Imperial City.

No one died, and their emotions quickly turned into love, overcoming many matters to result in today's marriage.

"They all say that it might also be related to the fact the one making the marriage proposal was me."

Xuanyuan Po said, "But I feel like the bride's family has a very good attitude and that everyone in the tribe is thinking too much."

Tang Thirty-Six said, "If it weren't you representing the groom in proposing marriage, would the bride's family have had such a good attitude? And by the way, when did you get involved in this matter?"

Xuanyuan Po explained, "He's a member of my tribe, and Huji's beef buns really are good. Oh, I forgot to mention that the groom is one of the laborers at the Huji steamed bun store. On that day, if he hadn't risked his life to throw the owner and chef out of the area, we wouldn't be able to keep eating those buns."

Tang Thirty-Six laughed and said, "That's too exaggerated. What sort of buns would be that good?"

Chen Changsheng did not laugh. He seriously said, "Those buns really were very good."

The Huji steamed bun store in the Pine Paths was close to the Celestial Tree temple, and so it was naturally close to Xuanyuan

Po's home.

Bie Yanghong loved the buns from this store. Alas, when he died, he had still not been able to eat a hot one.

The mood became somewhat gloomy.

Tang Thirty-Six had heard of what had transpired before Bie Yanghong's death and vaguely understood.

Xuanyuan Po bid farewell to Chen Changsheng and the others.

Chen Changsheng said, "In the future, let's meet again at the Orthodox Academy."

Xuanyuan Po nodded, then headed off with the bishops to the place the music was coming from.

Chen Changsheng silently watched as fireworks flew up from that direction. After a while, he said, "It's a good thing."

"Yes, there are still quite a few beautiful things in the world."

Tang Thirty-Six continued, "This being the case, who says that we're guaranteed to become like the White Emperor couple?"

Xu Yourong gave a faint smile, saying nothing.

Under the light of the sun, the temperature gradually rose.

The west wind gradually warmed, no longer as fierce and cold as it was before.

With a cry, the White Crane left the ground.

A black-clothed girl landed on the shore, causing the snow to tremble.

She asked in confusion, "Why are you in such a rush to leave?"

It was because Chen Changsheng had received a letter.

It was a letter from the capital.

Someone in the capital was getting married and had invited him to the ceremony. They had even requested him to be the officiator.

Chen Changsheng could elect to not participate in that marriage in White Emperor City, but he had to participate in that marriage in the capital.

And he knew that whether he was willing or not, he could not escape this assignment.

Just like how, in the past, whether he was willing or not, she would still sleep in his bed.

.....

.....

(End of Book 6 – Fierce the West Wind)

Book 7: Dare to Order the Sun and Moon to Shine Over New Skies

In hazy dreams, I curse the time passed,
Ah my home, thirty-two years have gone.
The red flag stirred the peasant to take up the halberd,
While the black hand held high the tyrant's whip.
Only because one seeks grand goals are there many sacrifices,
And I dare to order the sun and moon to shine over new skies.
In joy, I see the wave after wave of beans,
And the heroes from all-over returning in the evening mist.
—Shaoshan Revisited, Mao Zedong, 1959

Chapter 1043 – Good People Should Kill Bad People

On the sea was a ship.

This ship had departed from White Emperor City many days ago. It had not yet reached its destination because its occupants still hoped to receive good news and turn back.

No news had come even now, so the people on the ship had finally given up.

As she watched the coastline gradually appear before her eyes, a hint of relief finally appeared on Mu Jiushi's haggard face.

Her imperial uncle had died and something had probably happened to her older sister. She had no idea how to face her imperial brother, but to be able to return home was still something to be happy about.

The Second Prince glanced at her and lightly sighed. He knew that after this, it would be centuries before they would be able to step on the Central Continent.

At this moment, a boom could be heard in the air. The clouds in the sky scattered in fright. As the ship swayed, a person appeared on the bow.

It was a white-haired elder, his face round and large. He looked rather comical, or perhaps one could say that his appearance made one feel extremely happy.

Mu Jiushi and the Second Prince had no idea where this person had come from, but they knew that someone who could suddenly appear from out of the blue was assuredly powerful.

Moreover, this round-faced elder made no attempts to conceal his Qi—that divine Qi that exceeded the bounds of the mortal world.

Mu Jiushi warily looked at the elder and asked, "Who are you?"

The round-faced elder rubbed his head as if confused on how to answer. After a while, he said, "I apparently have the surname Cao."

This surname shocked both Mu Jiushi and the Second Prince.

There were few experts of the Divine Domain on the continent, and only one of them had the surname Cao.

It could only be Cao Yunping.

Cao Yunping was the Elder of Heavenly Secrets' nephew through his sister and had once been a member of the Storms of the Eight Directions.

Around a hundred years ago, for various unknown reasons, he had fought with Su Li and lost.

After this loss, he suddenly decided to give up on the technique he cultivated and begin learning a completely new one.

This was naturally extremely dangerous. Anyone could see that it was incredibly unwise.

But neither the Elder of Heavenly Secrets nor the Tianhai Divine Empress had been able to change his mind.

Cao Yunping had dispersed his cultivation and begun to cultivate anew, and just as he was about to succeed, the star radiance in his body had exploded. Although he had barely managed to cling to life, his sea of consciousness had been gravely damaged, causing his mind to become confused. To put it another way, he became mentally disabled.

From that moment, the Storms of the Eight Directions lost a member and no one could find any trace of him.

Mu Jiushi had never expected that this person would appear on her ship, and it was clear that he had recovered his lost cultivation, had perhaps even surpassed it.

"Does Senior... have any instruction?"

Upon hearing this question, Cao Yunping once more sank into a daze. He began to strenuously think back, his brow furrowing in exertion. This made his round face grow taut, making it look like a newly-stuffed pillow.

But neither Mu Jiushi nor the Second Prince dared to laugh.

Cao Yunping really might be mentally disabled, but he still had a terrifying level of strength and cultivation, which meant that he was extremely dangerous.

Cao Yunping finally remembered, his brow unfolding. With a joyful face, he said to them, "I remember now."

Mu Jiushi cautiously asked, "What did Senior remember?"

Cao Yunping did not directly answer her question, instead complaining, "Why did you all return so late? I've been waiting for you for many days."

Mu Jiushi suddenly felt rather uneasy, asking, "For what was Senior waiting for us?"

Cao Yunping replied, "I promised Chen Changsheng that I would kill you all."

Mu Jiushi and the Second Prince paled.

Cao Yunping remembered more and hurriedly said to the Second Prince, "Don't be scared, don't be scared, I remembered wrong. You weren't there. Only this girl must die."

Mu Jiushi glanced at the approaching coastline and forced herself to calm down. "Senior, why must you kill me? Might there be some misunderstanding between us?"

In her view, Chen Changsheng must have used some method to move this hidden expert, or else used words to deceive. So she naturally felt that she could think of some way to convince him or promise him some reward. The difference between the two

depended on whether this hidden expert was actually a fool or just pretending to be one.

"I'm already a fool, really. So I've been hiding in the mountains all this time precisely because I'm afraid that if I randomly attack someone on the outside, I'll end up killing a good person by mistake."

Cao Yunping earnestly explained, "But you are not a good person, because you colluded with the demons and also killed Bie Yanghong's son. I know Bie Yanghong. He is a good person."

Mu Jiushi was very nervous, but her expression remained indifferent. "Senior, why are you so sure that I am not a good person? Just because Chen Changsheng told you?"

"Yes, I believe in Chen Changsheng's words, because he is a good person. Qiushan also believes in him, and Qiushan is also a good person."

Cao Yunping patiently said to her, "They are all good people, but you are a bad person, so we want to kill you."

.....

.....

After leaving the shore of the Red River, the White Crane did not fly too far before landing in the mountains.

The four Prefects of the Orthodoxy and the three thousand cavalry had made camp here while they waited.

Linghai Zhiwang reported to Chen Changsheng, "A letter came from the Qiushan clan. It seems that person has gone to the Western Sea."

Chen Changsheng froze, then asked, "Confirmed?"

Linghai Zhiwang replied, "Yes."

Xu Yourong asked, "Who went to the Western Sea?"

"Cao Yunping."

Chen Changsheng explained, "Some time ago, I met him in the sky."

Xu Yourong knew that when he was flying from the Prince of Luling's estate to White Emperor City to give aid, a supreme expert had attempted to make trouble for him mid-journey. It was only now that she discovered that it had been Cao Yunping. She knew who Cao Yunping was and knew of his relationship to Qiushan Jun. She was naturally able to guess why Cao Yunping had appeared, so she gave Chen Changsheng an apologetic glance.

Chen Changsheng said, "It's fine. It should have been the Prince of Xiang that had someone send a message, nothing to do with the Qiushan clan."

Xu Yourong said, "I heard Senior Brother say before that this senior truly does have a problem with his mind. Won't that affect his judgment?"

"It truly has been damaged somewhat. Senior's current level of intelligence is around that of a child, but... he is a good person."

Chen Changsheng sighed, "I didn't expect that my random remark from that night would really make Senior trouble himself to go to the Western Sea."

Linghai Zhiwang took out a sheet of paper and passed it to Chen Changsheng.

It was a yellow sheet of paper, and ten-some names were written on it in cinnabar.

These names had been written out on the first night after the arrival of Linghai Zhiwang's group in White Emperor City.

Madam Mu's name had been written at the top of the page. It had already been crossed out, signifying that she had died.

Chen Changsheng took a brush from Daoist Siyuan. He dipped

the brush in dissolved cinnabar and, on the second row, drew a line across Mu Jiushi's name.

This was a list of people to be killed.

From Hanqiu City to Wenshui, from Wenshui to Fengyang City, from Fengyang City to Holy Maiden Peak, and from Holy Maiden Peak to White Emperor City, all the people that needed to be killed had their names written down.

Next to Mu Jiushi's name was Chusu's.

Everyone's gazes fell on this name.

The camp became somewhat quiet.

Chapter 1044 – The Spring Breeze Sends Warmth to Join in Killing Su

On the list, the most powerful person other than Madam Mu was Chusu. Moreover, this was a monster that cultivated the Yellow Springs art. It had formidable methods of escape, was incredibly secretive, and its techniques were ever-changing and unfathomable. It was extremely sinister and crafty, and though it had lost an arm to Xu Yourong in White Emperor City, it was still very difficult to kill.

It could be presumed that this monster was already hiding in this vast range of mountains. How could they find it?

"Perhaps I can guess where he is."

The blind zither player from the Tang clan suddenly offered, "If Your Holiness does not mind, this matter can be given to me."

Everyone remembered that this blind zither had been the previous generation's Grand Elder of the Longevity Sect and the monster called Chusu was a strand of the previous Longevity Sect Master's soul.

Linghai Zhiwang turned to Chen Changsheng, clearly rather willing.

Chen Changsheng did not agree, because the blind zither player had suffered heavy injuries in that battle with the Angel which would be very difficult to recover from in a short time. And besides, he was still a Guardian of the Tang clan.

Xu Yourong understood his meaning and proposed, "Have me do it."

She was undoubtedly the best choice for killing Chusu, perhaps the only choice.

Her Daoist technique was a natural counter to the Yellow Springs

art, and she could rely on her speed to destroy Chusu's escape techniques.

Besides her, no one else present could catch up to Chusu, and even if they could, they were not guaranteed to kill it. Not even Chen Changsheng was very confident.

But Chen Changsheng still did not agree, and his reason obtained the approval of everyone present.

He would be returning to the capital soon. In that city was an even more important matter, and an even more troublesome problem.

At this time, Xu Yourong could not leave his side.

Linghai Zhiwang asked, "Then what can we do? Put it aside for now?"

The camp once more fell silent, the mood oppressive.

"I'll think of a way."

Chen Changsheng glanced at Xu Yourong and walked out of the camp. Xu Yourong understood and followed him.

Linghai Zhiwang and the others were somewhat worried and looked to Tang Thirty-Six.

Tang Thirty-Six waved his hands, indicating that he would not be taking part in this matter.

"I'll go and see."

As the least senior of the archbishops, Hu Thirty-Two helplessly sighed and walked out of the camp.

Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong stopped under a pine tree growing along a cliff.

He knew that Hu Thirty-Two was behind him, but he did not order him to stop.

If he did not let the archbishops know what he intended, they

would probably find it very hard to be at ease.

A cool breeze caused pine needles to rustle down from the tree.

A few yellowed needles fell on mottled yellow fur, seeming to melt into it and become almost indistinguishable.

It was a dog-like animal, its fur rather messy. It looked somewhat repulsive.

Its two hindlegs seemed to have been broken, and it looked rather pitiful as it dragged them along the ground.

When it looked at Chen Changsheng, a flash of excitement gleamed in its eyes. It used its forelegs to raise its body and quickly crawl up to Chen Changsheng, where it incessantly kissed his feet.

Xu Yourong tilted her head as she viewed this sight, finding it quite interesting.

Although this was not her first time seeing this sort of sight, she still felt like laughing every time she saw this monster act like a treacherous official.

Hu Thirty-Two was not at all interested. When he saw those tiny, evil eyes, he felt his body chill.

Suddenly, he recalled the origins of this monster and his expression instantly changed. He shakily asked, "This is an Earth Monkey?"

Yes, this was that Earth Monkey that had lived in the Garden of Zhou for centuries.

It was also that monster described in the Daoist scriptures as the most sinister, most shameless, most crafty, and most bloodthirsty.

Even the Mountain-toppling Fiend and the Monster Bull, massive monsters ranked extremely high on the Ranking of Monsters, were not willing to offend the Earth Monkey. They would even listen to its orders in battle.

Upon confirming that this mangy yellow dog-like being was that

horrifying monster of legend and recalling the gruesome stories surrounding it, Hu Thirty-Two felt even colder.

If it weren't for the fact that it was Chen Changsheng who had summoned this Earth Monkey and the Earth Monkey was acting so meek and obedient, he would immediately attempt to kill it.

The Earth Monkey sensed the hostility from Hu Thirty-Two, as well as that faint fear.

For humans to still remember its infamous reputation even though it had not been seen in the world for so many years made it rather proud, though it quickly sobered up.

Unlike those monsters who wished to continue their peaceful lives in the Garden of Zhou, the Earth Monkey had always wanted to return to the living world and take a look around.

It had begged Chen Changsheng many times, but Chen Changsheng knew of its vicious reputation and its evil ways, so he naturally did not agree. But since Chen Changsheng had finally summoned it out of the Garden of Zhou into the real world today, this naturally meant that the situation had changed, that perhaps it really did have a chance of fulfilling its wish.

At this crucial moment, the Earth Monkey would not commit any mistakes. Its eyes turned innocent and its expression even humbler, its body pressing even lower to the ground. Its two crippled hindlegs began to tremble while its tail beat against the floor, but it was also extremely careful to not raise a single speck of dust. It had truly succeeded in mastering the art of looking pitiful.

Hu Thirty-Two remained wary. He would not be fooled by this act. Xu Yourong, on the other, finally could no longer suppress her laugh.

Chen Changsheng said, "Stop pretending and quickly rise."

At these words, the Earth Monkey hurriedly straightened its body, no longer daring to make a single extraneous movement.

Its two crippled hindlegs had actually been cured a long time ago.

It was just that in the Garden of Zhou, it had gotten used to dragging its hindlegs along as it crawled across the plains. The only monsters that knew of this fact were the Mountain-toppling Fiend and the Monster Bull.

Chen Changsheng said, "Help me with a matter."

The Earth Monkey's eyes began to roll around in thought.

Chen Changsheng took a pill from his bosom and fed it to the Earth Monkey.

The Earth Monkey's eyes instantly lit up. It sat on the ground and, just like a cultivator, closed its eyes in meditation.

A light mist began to flow out of its nostrils. Its remaining internal injuries had been completely cured.

The pill had not been the Cinnabar Pill, but had been made from the dregs left over after refining the Cinnabar Pill. However, the pill still contained some of Chen Changsheng's blood.

After some time, the Earth Monkey opened its eyes and gave Chen Changsheng a look of absolute gratitude.

Chen Changsheng took a drawing of Chusu from Hu Thirty-Two and unrolled it in front of the Earth Monkey's eyes. "This person."

The Earth Monkey looked at the strangely-shaped fellow in the drawing and thought to itself, there's someone in the world that's actually uglier than me. Its curiosity was piqued.

Chen Changsheng said, "Kill it."

The Earth Monkey instantly came to its senses, letting out several low growls. It used its bloodthirsty killing intent to prove its loyalty.

Hu Thirty-Two finally understood what Chen Changsheng intended to do.

It was well-known that Earth Monkeys had the innate ability to travel through the earth, and they were also extremely cruel and sinister. This was the best choice for hunting down and killing Chusu.

But Chusu was also a true monster. The Earth Monkey did not necessarily have the ability to kill it.

"I have an idea."

Hu Thirty-Two knew that voicing this suggestion might alter the Pope's view of him, even cause the Pope to be wary of him.

But as his most loyal subordinate, he had to voice his suggestion, leaving nothing to hide.

After hearing this idea, the gaze Chen Changsheng aimed at him truly did change.

Even the Earth Monkey's gaze toward Hu Thirty-Two changed, as if it had recognized a comrade.

Xu Yourong just shook her head.

.....

.....

The Earth Monkey left the cliff, heading into the mountains to seek out the world it had lost and Chusu.

Other Chen Changsheng, Xu Yourong, and Hu Thirty-Two, no one knew of this matter, and nobody knew what sort of attitude the Earth Monkey would use to appear in front of Chusu.

Not long after the Earth Monkey's departure, the Orthodoxy's convoy set out for the capital.

Everyone knew that Chen Changsheng was returning to the capital because he had received a letter.

But was it really because of that letter?

Of course it was not. The young emperor was still in the capital,

as was Shang Xingzhou.

And most importantly, the Li Palace was also in the capital.

Chapter 1045 – The Xu Estate of the Old Days

Linghai Zhiwang, Archbishop An Lin, and the other figures of their level knew that, starting from three years ago, someone in the capital had been constantly sending letters to the Pope.

Whether the Pope was in the snowy mountains, Hanqiu City, or Wenshui, those letters had never stopped.

The writer of these letters had been of great help to their plans, especially in the last few months.

Many people had speculated as to who the mysterious person behind these letters was.

Linghai Zhiwang had once thought this person was Tianhai Shengxue, while Archbishop An Lin believed that it was most likely to be Prince Chen Liu.

It was only after the news of the marriage was spread throughout the continent, along with the news that Chen Changsheng was intending to return to the capital to officiate this marriage, that people finally learned that the writer of these letters had actually been Mo Yu.

As the most powerful woman in the Tianhai government, or perhaps even the most powerful person, many people did not understand why Mo Yu had been able to survive the Tianhai Divine Empress's death. Moreover, she was still living openly in the capital and was even getting married to that person.

Many people believed that her relationship with Chen Changsheng made the Imperial Court somewhat cautious.

In that year, in the middle of a snowstorm, Mo Yu and Zhexiu had executed Zhou Tong on the Road of Peace by death of a thousand cuts. Even now, the people of the capital found that scene impossible to forget.

But had Chen Changsheng really decided to return to the capital just because she had written a letter to him requesting him to officiate the marriage?

Linghai Zhiwang and the others did not think so.

They were only looking at Chen Changsheng's back, but they could still feel that heavy pressure.

The invisible yet infinitely heavy sky seemed to have descended onto his shoulders.

In that same year, on a night of harsh wind and snow, Shang Xingzhou and Chen Changsheng had carried out a conversation in the Orthodox Academy.

Other than the little Black Dragon, no one knew the specifics of that conversation, but many people could guess based on what happened afterward.

Shang Xingzhou and Chen Changsheng, this master and disciple, had likely reached some sort of agreement.

Chen Changsheng would leave the capital, becoming the first exiled Pope in history.

Many stories happened after that, from the snowy mountains to Wenshui to Holy Maiden Peak, and finally to White Emperor City.

Only when they were confronting the demons, the threat from the Sacred Light Continent, and the cunning schemes of the White Emperor did this master and disciple finally work together, proving that statement: A temple of Xining rules the world. The relationship between the two seemed to have mellowed.

But now, with Chen Changsheng determined to return to the capital, this agreement seemed about to come to an end.

So would this journey be an ice-breaking trip, or would it be the opening to a human civil war?

.....

.....

The winter was reaching its end, but spring had still not come. The world was still cold.

Both within and without the city, the Luo River was frozen, its icy surface covered in a thick mantle of snow, making it look like a massive belt.

Three thousand cavalry escorting the Orthodoxy convoy came out of the horizon, entering the eyes of the crowd.

Linghai Zhiwang and the other Prefects of the Orthodoxy sat in the divine carriage at the very front.

The Gloom Willow and the other treasures of the Li Palace exuded a warm and holy light into the gray skies.

Tens of thousands of people lined the road into the city, welcoming the return of the Orthodoxy's diplomatic mission.

The common people had no idea of what exactly had happened in White Emperor City, but they did know that the schemes of the demons had been broken and their greatest worry, the betrayal of the Demi-human race, had not been realized. Moreover, all this was due to the efforts of the Li Palace.

Fruits and fresh flowers, rare and precious in the winter, were thrown into the laps of the Orthodoxy cavalry.

Most of the gazes were focused on the two massive divine carriages in the back of the convoy.

These were gazes of passion, respect, adoration, and fervor.

They had heard that the Pope was returning.

The Holy Maiden was also returning.

As the convoy slowly pressed forward, the crowd lining the road began to press forward, growing increasingly packed.

If not for the officials and soldiers of the City Gate Department

strictly keeping order, chaos really might have ensued.

An Hua, dressed in the uniform of the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green, led several thousand of the Orthodoxy's most fervent believers in prostrating to those two divine carriages.

More and more people began to prostrate, a massive and majestic tide.

.....

.....

The capital did not have a city wall. Unless one rode a flying carriage, one would have to stand on some of the taller buildings within the city to see farther.

In these last three years, Tianhai Chenwu had resided in his estate outside the city. He rarely entered the city, and his visits to the palace to privately speak with the emperor were few and far between. He was the head of the Tianhai clan, and in the complex situation at present, no amount of caution could be considered excessive.

Today, however, was an exception. He had reserved the entirety of the Pine Forest Lodge, a restaurant just as famous as Clear Lake Restaurant, and had invited several extremely conspicuous nobles so that they could look afar from this high place. There were several Divine Generals amongst these nobles, but the most important of them was still the Prince of Zhongshan.

As they watched that tide of people prostrating, the Divine Generals turned somewhat gloomy. As the proud students of the former and now deceased Principal of Star Seizer Academy, Chen Guansong, they had played extremely important roles in Shang Xingzhou's administration. They naturally found this scene somewhat difficult to endure.

But they did not voice their complaints, nor did they have the ability to voice them.

These commoners were paying respects to the Pope and the Holy Maiden. Nothing could be more proper in the world.

Moreover, in the ceremony to close South Stream Temple, the Pope had personally killed the White Tiger Divine General in front of the Prince of Xiang.

Even so, how had the Imperial Court responded?

Tianhai Chenwu looked at the woman in the front of the crowd, who was dressed in the uniform of the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green. He slightly creased his brow and asked, "Who is that person?"

Apart from her relationship to Archbishop An Lin, An Hua was an ordinary priest. But she was now extremely famous in the capital and in the northern reaches of the continent. A subordinate quickly reported on her background.

"A pack of foolish men and stupid women!" Tianhai Chenwu harshly rebuked. "They truly know nothing. Are they making a show of force to the Imperial Court?"

"A show of force? This is the will of the common people, and this was all done by that person you consider a stupid woman."

The Prince of Zhongshan still had his rancid expression, as if everyone in the world owed him money. Perhaps it was because he had still not been able to forget how he had been forced to eat feces for so many years. However, his tone when speaking was much gentler.

Tianhai Chenwu understood his meaning. Chen Changsheng had been secluded from the world for three years, so that he had been able to gain such loyalty and such a fine reputation in such a short time was naturally due to the Li Palace, especially to those fervent believers led by An Hua spreading the word.

His gaze left An Hua and fell on those two divine carriages in the back, where it froze.

With his level of strength, he could tell at a glance that no one was in them.

.....

.....

After three years, Chen Changsheng finally returned to the capital.

He did not go to the Li Palace, or to the Orthodox Academy, or to the Imperial Palace to see his senior brother. Instead, he went straight to an estate.

Many years ago, when he first came to the capital, he had also gone straight to this place. He did not go to see the green ivy and stone pillars outside the Li Palace, did not go to the Mausoleum of Books. At that time, this conduct had even elicited a round of contempt from the mistress of this estate.

This estate was naturally the Divine General of the East's estate.

The Xu Estate had the same old appearance, brimming with a somber air. 'Ruling his household like he commanded his troops' was not an empty phrase.

All the maids had been ordered to stand far away, leaving only a few people in the reception hall.

Chen Changsheng sat in a chair. Xu Shiji's wife, Nanny Hua, and Shuang'er were standing.

The mood was very awkward. Even the tension in the air seemed unable to circulate. Everything seemed frozen.

Chapter 1046 – She Says

A cup of tea had been placed on the table. Its contents had long since cooled.

Chen Changsheng quietly sat in the chair. He clearly did not intend to speak first.

It was just like that year. It seemed like nothing had changed.

In truth, everything had changed ages ago.

That young Daoist who was entering the capital for the first time so that he could end his engagement was now the Pope.

Fortunately, just like in the past, Xu Shiji was not present, or else the mood would be even more awkward.

The curtain of beads lightly clacked as Xu Yourong walked through it.

Upon returning to the Divine General's estate, Xu Yourong had paid little attention to him. After leaving him in the hall, she had gone to clean herself up.

This was a very casual action, just like the black hair now casually cascading behind her.

A few beads of water could be seen in her damp hair. Coupled with her spotless face, as beautiful as a flower, she presented a very moving sight.

Chen Changsheng was very pleased by his fiancée's beauty, and he even more loved the casual way she treated him. He wanted to keep watching her like this, but this was still the Xu Estate. And besides, he had many more things he needed to do.

He stood up and said to Xu Yourong, "Then I'll go first."

Surprised, Xu Yourong asked, "You're not going to eat?"

This was her home and Chen Changsheng was her fiancé. She

treated both very casually, so she asked this question very naturally. Only when she noticed the strange air of the reception hall did she understand his reason. She couldn't help but smile and said, "Then you can go."

"I'll come to pick you up tomorrow," Chen Changsheng said.

He turned and bid farewell to Madam Xu, and he did not forget to nod in greeting to Nanny Hua and Shuang'er.

There was nothing to be criticized about him, neither in courtesy nor attitude.

This sort of composure made Madam Xu and the others recall that sight from several years ago.

These last few years seemed to have effected no change on him. Both the young Daoist from the past and the Pope of the present treated the world and the people within it with the same sort of composure and indifference.

After walking out of the Divine General's estate and walking along that unremarkable stream, one would quickly arrive at the crude arch of the stone bridge.

When Chen Changsheng walked onto this bridge, he did not, as he had done several years ago, turn around to look at the beautiful estate.

Returning to the capital after three years, he did not go to the Li Palace or the Orthodox Academy, but to the Xu Estate. It wasn't because he wanted to do anything, but because his fiancée wanted him to accompany her back home. The reason had been that simple.

Over the years, he had played the guest twice at the Xu Estate. Did he feel proud and elated? No. Did he feel like it was all a lifetime ago? No.

He and Xu Yourong were both still very young, with long lives ahead of them. They still had many things to do, many places to

go.

Compared to the future, the past was far too unimportant.

Thus, he would let it be the past. Perhaps that had always been why the past existed.

A snowflake suddenly drifted down.

Chen Changsheng opened the Yellow Paper Umbrella and vanished into the crowd.

.....

.....

'Let the past be the past.' This was a simple phrase and a simple principle, but not everyone could do it.

Like Xu Shiji.

Upon returning to the estate and hearing of what had happened during the day, he gained an abnormally nasty expression. In the end, however, he did nothing.

He didn't even break a porcelain wine cup.

Because Xu Yourong was currently resting in the rear courtyard.

All of the Divine General's estate was as quiet as an ancient and remote mountain range.

In the last few years, Xu Shiji had already admitted to the fact that his status in the Great Zhou Dynasty was completely due to his daughter.

Whether it was with the Tianhai Divine Empress or now, nothing had changed.

This was a hard fact to accept, but he had still accepted it.

He simply had no idea how to face his daughter.

Madam Xu also could not forget those matters of the past. Downcast, she said, "Back then, how could I have imagined that he

would become the Pope?"

Xu Shiji sternly replied, "And what of it? In the end, he's still Xu Shiji's son-in-law!"

.....

.....

"Seeing the son-in-law depart in such an easygoing matter, it's truly hard to know just how proud he was in his heart."

In the rear courtyard, Shuang'er was holding a bowl of blue lobster meat in front of Xu Yourong as she somewhat resentfully spoke.

Xu Yourong lightly replied, "Back then, you mentioned in your letter that he left the same way. What did he have to be proud of back then?"

Shuang'er pondered the question, then said, "The him from back then... he was too fake, or perhaps unreasonable?"

Xu Yourong raised her head and gave Shuang'er a light glance.

Shuang'er became nervous and hurriedly said, "Young Lady, I was wrong."

Xu Yourong asked, "Do you know how you were wrong?"

As Shuang'er thought about her extremely dissatisfactory evaluations of Chen Changsheng from back then and thought about the deep affection her young lady had for him, she grew more and more nervous. In a shaky voice, she said, "I was not able to see the son-in-law's good points, and I also made many comments about him."

"Your insight truly can't be considered good, but just how many people back then could see his good points?"

Xu Yourong suddenly recalled how, on her return to the capital, she had visited the Orthodox Academy at night and unexpectedly met Mo Yu in his room.

Then she recalled how Mo Yu was about to get married but had also demanded him to come and officiate. She couldn't help but arch her brow and think, this counts as a person with insight.

"Just what are his good points?"

Xu Yourong lightly replied, "I love how, no matter what he encounters, even if it's the terror of death, he never gets depressed, and he certainly won't lose all restraint like someone that's given up. He remains focused and dedicated, persistent and calm."

Shuang'er could not understand, but she could hear the true love in her young lady's words, which stunned her.

Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong's marriage was now a certainty, but even now, she still did not believe that her young lady actually loved Chen Changsheng.

Because in her view, her young lady was just like the Phoenix: innately noble, proud, and aloof. How could she love a human?

At this moment, a maid came in with a report: Xu Shiji had arrived.

The gate to the courtyard was opened and a set of footprints appeared on the snow.

The two sat across from each other, two precious tea cups placed on the table between them.

Everything was polite and courteous. They did not seem like father and daughter, but like someone receiving a guest.

Xu Shiji looked at his daughter. He wanted to speak but had no idea what to say, so he hesitated.

In the end, he only casually expressed concern about how she was eating and her quarters before leaving. Only, before leaving, he failed to conceal his anxiety.

Xu Yourong knew what her father wanted to say, or perhaps what he wanted her to say to Chen Changsheng.

When she was little, her father had this same appearance whenever he wanted to enter the palace to see the Divine Empress.

She did not want to listen, because she did not intend to say anything to Chen Changsheng.

It was the same when she was little. She had never been willing to speak with the Divine Empress about these matters.

From the moment the blood of the Heavenly Phoenix awakened and she began to cultivate, she found these matters very boring and bothersome.

Tonight, she felt annoyed, so she climbed up to the roof, put her hands behind her back, and began to observe the stars.

Dark clouds lay thick over the night sky, making it impossible to see the uncountable stars above. But they could not keep out her spiritual sense.

She observed the sea of stars, comparing them to rubbings of the Heavenly Tome Monoliths. She quietly comprehended, gradually calming her Dao heart.

In a whirl of wind and snow, a girl dressed in black landed next to Xu Yourong.

The light was rather dim, but the cinnabar birthmark between her brows was still bright and striking.

Xu Yourong stared at it and saw two eyes.

The black-clothed girl asked in annoyance, "Are you that curious?"

Xu Yourong earnestly replied, "Of course. When I was little, I went to New North Bridge for an outing one year. I really did intend to jump into the well and find you."

The black-clothed girl sneered, "Why didn't I see you then? And you're still alive."

Xu Yourong gazed at the snow falling down from the sky and

smiled. "The Empress saved me."

Chapter 1047 – How Is This Good?

Before she went off to South Stream Temple to study, Xu Yourong had left many famous deeds in the capital. In her young and tender years, she had jumped into the Luo River, claiming that the Moon was there. She would often climb the stone pillars in the front of the Li Palace, stating that she wanted to see the stars. And there was one time where she almost jumped into New North Bridge's abandoned well when no one was looking.

It was said that just as she was about to jump into that well, the Divine Empress had saved her.

At the time, Xu Yourong had not even reached five years of age.

The people of the capital knew of these matters like the backs of their hands. In their view, they had watched Xu Yourong grow up. She was the capital's most beloved daughter, so when they learned of her engagement after the Ivy Festival, they had been so enraged at Chen Changsheng, put so much pressure on the Orthodox Academy.

When the little Black Dragon thought of the Divine Empress, she felt a subconscious fear. After a moment, she came to her senses and said, "From a certain perspective, she really did change your life."

Xu Yourong faintly smiled. "Perhaps."

.....

.....

Without the Tianhai Divine Empress, the Phoenix-blooded Xu Yourong still might have reached her current level of success.

But nobody could deny that the woman who had once dominated the continent had changed the lives of many people.

Mo Yu was the epitome of this.

Without the Tianhai Divine Empress, how could this lonely woman whose entire family had been executed have been able to become the Grand Lady Mo whose authority could be felt in all levels of society?

As he gazed at the ten-some orange lanterns hanging over the gate, giving off warm light, Chen Changsheng thought of the changes in the last few years and couldn't help but emotionally sigh.

Many years had passed since he had come from Xining Village to the capital, and he had known Mo Yu for quite some time, but tonight was his first visit to the legendary Orange Garden.

He could sense the powerful array in the Orange Garden, and he could also sense the spies and guards ensconced in the surrounding darkness.

It was clear that even though she was about to marry that prince, still many people did not wish to see Mo Yu return to the capital, and held a deep wariness and hostility toward her.

Chen Changsheng had no intention of concealing his tracks. Raising the Yellow Paper Umbrella, he walked up to the gate.

The gate of the Orange Garden opened, then closed, accompanied by two creaks and several flakes of snow.

As the gate opened and closed, the darkness suddenly fell into turmoil. Ten-some figures flew through the snow to various places in the capital.

The Pope had left the Divine General of the East's estate and gone to the Orange Garden.

In a short time, the entire capital was informed of this news, and it was naturally reported to those princely estates lining the Road of Peace.

In the worst-positioned and most unremarkable princely estate, the Prince of Louyang was like an ant on the rim of a hot pot,

constantly walking in circles. The window of his study was wide open, letting the occasional snowflake come in, but this could not lessen the sweat coming from that plump and round face.

He suddenly stopped and looked at a woman. With a sour face, he asked, "What do I do? What do I do?"

The woman was very confused. "Your Highness, this means that His Holiness the Pope highly values the Princess. Nothing could be better."

The Prince of Louyang gave her a resentful glance and said, "You also know that she's a princess..."

"Good heavens." The woman finally understood what he meant. With a shocked face, she said, "Is Your Highness jealous?"

The Prince of Louyang snorted for some time, but he could not bring himself to speak. His meaning, however, was crystal-clear.

If this woman were not his aunt who had hurried over from Ru Province to supervise his marriage, he would not even dare make this sort of implication.

Everyone said that the princes of the Chen clan had already regained their power, but he was the worst of the lot, and his rival... was the Pope.

The woman huffed, "Everyone knows about the relationship between His Holiness and the Holy Maiden. What nonsense is Your Highness thinking? If not out of respect for Princess, how could His Holiness agree to officiate this wedding? If not for this relationship, would His Majesty have assigned you a place as important as Taichang Temple?"

These words made the Prince of Louyang immediately forget his jealousy, but the just-stymied sweat began to pour out once more. Sobbing, he said, "The people from the Tianhai clan and several county princes are all staring at that position. I didn't expect His Majesty would let me go. Seeing as how I've offended so many

people, I really can't see how this is good."

.....

.....

Chen Changsheng glanced at the window, only seeing that it was still snowing.

He cared a great deal about cleanliness, but he still did not understand why women liked to take baths on such cold days.

Mo Yu truly deserved her reputation as the most famous beauty of the Tianhai government. She had just gotten out of the bath and her face was clean of makeup, but her appearance was still like a painting, her beauty moving.

If one discussed the famous events in the capital over the last two years, the most famous was probably Mo Yu's return.

Those Chen clan princes who hated the Tianhai Divine Empress to the bone had not given her any trouble for several reasons.

The Mo clan had suffered a tragic fate in the previous government, causing Mo Yu to gain the sympathy of many of the older ministers.

More importantly, she had been summoned by the emperor to return to the palace.

And Shang Xingzhou, out of respect for her grandfather, that famous Grand Scholar, had given his silent consent.

And there was another important reason: she was about to get married to a prince surnamed Chen, and it was that most annoying, useless, and least threatening prince.

"I still don't understand why you're marrying him."

Chen Changsheng's question was one that everyone else in the capital was asking.

No matter what they felt to Mo Yu, whether it was love or hate,

she was still Grand Lady Mo.

Everyone felt that the prince was not a good match for her.

"What's so bad about him? He's innately honest, has no ambition, I knew him when I was little, and most importantly, he's willing to trust me unconditionally."

Mo Yu sat by the bed, using a soft cotton towel to wipe her damp hair. She casually continued, "Back when the capital was in such chaos, he brought those subordinates that his brothers forced on him with the intention of coming to the Orange Garden to request my protection. In truth, he was the one that wanted to protect me. I have to return this affection."

Chen Changsheng knew of this matter, as did everyone in the capital.

On the night of the coup of the Mausoleum of Books, ten-some princes entered the capital, taking enormous risks to separately assault the various ministries and strategic locations. As for the Prince of Louyang, he brought his experts all around the capital as he fled, not daring to do anything, not daring to kill anyone. He only wanted to find the Orange Garden, but he ended up getting lost.

This was not some beautiful story, but a comedy, a joke.

Many people thought that the Prince of Louyang was just a joke.

Chen Changsheng also felt this prince to be too mediocre and useless, not at all a good match.

"What's it mean to be a good match? It's fine as long as he treats me well."

Mo Yu suddenly remembered something and said, "In the future, you should treat him better as well. Don't be so rude."

Chen Changsheng said, "I'm just advising from the standpoint of a friend. Since you don't agree, I naturally won't bring it up in the

future."

Mo Yu glared at him and said, "I'm talking about the Prince of Luling's estate. Just look at how badly you scared him, and you even knew he was a coward."

Chen Changsheng himself did not know why he had treated the Prince of Louyang so rudely in the Prince of Luling's estate.

"He was acting as a messenger between you and your master and ended up with nothing good. Truly unfortunate."

Mo Yu said, "You were wrong in this matter."

Chen Changsheng replied, "I won't act like that in the future."

Upon seeing him promise, Mo Yu actually became unhappy. "Come over."

Chen Changsheng froze for a second, then asked, "To do what?"

Mo Yu replied, "I want to hug you as I sleep."

Chapter 1048 – A Very, Very Deep Place

"What?"

"I want to hug you as I sleep."

"Ah?"

"Mm."

Mo Yu spoke boldly and frankly.

Chen Changsheng felt like a thunderclap had gone off by his ear.

He waved his hands and said, "Stop messing around."

Mo Yu asked, "Then why did you come?"

Chen Changsheng said, "I came to see you, advise you, and also thank you."

Mo Yu truly had done many things for him, truly did deserve to have him personally come and offer his thanks.

Mo Yu replied, "If you want to thank me, then you should accompany me as I sleep."

Chen Changsheng felt very helpless. "You're going to get married in a few days."

"Back then, I made no request to have you sleep with me."

Mo Yu looked at him and said, "It's precisely because I'm about to get married that I want to sleep with you."

Her words were still bold and frank, but this frankness concealed many meanings, many very obvious meanings.

Chen Changsheng had no idea what to say.

Mo Yu stared into his eyes and said, "If you don't dare come over, it means you have feelings for me."

After some hesitation, Chen Changsheng walked to her bedside.

Mo Yu wrapped her arms around his waist and buried her face in

his back.

Chen Changsheng suddenly remembered a matter.

"Didn't you take a set of my bedding and pillows from the Orthodox Academy?"

Mo Yu was currently leaning into his back, so she did not need to worry about being seen by him, which put her much at ease.

When she heard these words, two patches of red quickly spread through her face as she thought, I really was ridiculous back then. But she happened to forget that she was being quite ridiculous right now.

"It's been a long time. The smell on the bedding and pillows faded a long time ago."

"Ah... Then have you still been suffering from insomnia lately?"

"It's strange. After Empress left, I stopped getting insomnia. When I was at Zhou Tong's other residence the other day, I even managed to take a midday nap."

"Is that so?"

"That's right."

"I'll just sit like this. You can sleep a while."

"Mm, just for a while. A while will be fine."

The room fell quiet.

Chen Changsheng sat on the side of the bed, not daring to move a muscle.

Mo Yu hugged his waist, not moving an inch.

This should have been an incredibly uncomfortable posture, but she still quickly fell asleep so soundly that she even began to softly snore.

Time slowly passed, just like the snow gradually piling up outside the window.

Just when Chen Changsheng believed that he would have sit for an entire night, just when he was thinking about how he should explain things to Xu Yourong on the morrow, Mo Yu woke up.

One hour of sleep had filled her with energy. One could imagine the quality of this sleep.

A maid brought her a bowl of swallow's nest soup. She took two mouthfuls and suddenly raised her head. Looking at Chen Changsheng, she asked, "Why haven't you left?"

Feeling helpless, Chen Changsheng said, "I thought that you wrote me a letter asking me to come because you wanted to discuss some things."

It turns out that all you wanted was to hug me as you slept.

Mo Yu replied, "There's nothing good to talk about. It's very quiet in the capital, not much different from before."

Mo Yu had been writing him letters for the past three years, so he was no stranger to the state of the court.

In the court, the ten-some Chen princes, led by the Prince of Xiang and the Prince of Zhongshan, the Tianhai clan, and the several Divine Generals raised by Chen Guansong were part of one faction. The other faction consisted of ministers that had survived the previous government and Eunuch Lin in the palace.

A simple way to distinguish these two factions was in their attitude toward the emperor.

"If your master were willing to care about these matters, these problems naturally wouldn't have appeared, but it's clear that he doesn't want to care about them."

Mo Yu added, "Perhaps he wants to see His Majesty's administrative skills, or perhaps he just wants to temper His Majesty."

"Senior can handle these matters."

Chen Changsheng recalled how long ago in Xining Village, he had caught those scaleless fish living in the stream by the temple which his senior had cooked.

His senior was the best at cooking fish, because his heart was still, making him very patient and granting him a steady hand.

"So the Imperial Court's greatest problems are outside the Imperial Court. Put more accurately, it's its relationship with the Orthodoxy."

Mo Yu said, "Many people want to know how the venerable Daoist will deal with your return to the capital."

Chen Changsheng said, "I'm waiting to meet him."

After he departed the capital in the snowstorm, the master and disciple had not met once.

Now that he had returned, a meeting was inevitable.

He was confident that in this meeting, Shang Xingzhou would have to look him straight in the eyes, and could no longer treat him as a stranger.

Mo Yu asked, "Could it be a meeting in which a single smile dissolves all grudges?"

Chen Changsheng said nothing. He knew what the greatest problem between him and his master was.

It was a knot of the heart incredibly difficult to untie. In the end, besides using a sword to cut it apart, there seemed no better method.

Mo Yu paid no attention to his stance. "Although everyone, me included, do not understand why you two decided to become enemies, I think that you should prepare for the venerable Daoist to change his stance. When he expresses an intent to make peace, your reaction needs to be faster."

Chen Changsheng asked, "You really think that his stance will

change?"

"Who knows? With the matter of White Emperor City, both he and the Imperial Court owe you a favor, and perhaps he suddenly gets over it."

Mo Yu noted, "In order to exterminate the demons, it wouldn't be surprising for him to do something like that."

Chen Changsheng knew that the possibility was small, but just as Mo Yu said, everything was possible.

When he thought about how there really might be this slim possibility, he suddenly felt a little hope.

"If it can be this way, then nothing would be better."

"But if it's only this way, it's far from enough to resolve the problems between you two."

"I don't understand what you mean."

"You feel that if the venerable Daoist's stance changes, this story will have a happy ending?"

Mo Yu looked at him and said, "On the contrary, if it really is this way, it means a tragedy is about to commence."

Chen Changsheng asked, "Just what do you want to say?"

Mo Yu asked back, "Will you take revenge for the Divine Empress?"

Chen Changsheng shook his head. Let alone the fact that this would make the Human race fall into a civil war, even revenge itself had no meaning.

The Divine Empress had saved his life, but he still did not have the right to raise that great banner.

His senior brother had the most right to take revenge for the Divine Empress, but he was the Emperor of the Great Zhou, his master's most beloved and most trusted disciple.

Not even his senior could do anything about that matter, much less him.

"Many people, including those princes, are all watching me, wary of me. They are all afraid that I will take revenge for the Empress."

Mo Yu looked into his eyes and said, "But all of you have forgotten. The person that wants to take revenge for the Empress the most is not you, not His Majesty, and it's not me either."

Chen Changsheng suddenly felt uneasy.

He truly had forgotten.

All the officials and generals had forgotten.

The entire continent had forgotten.

The person who wanted to avenge the Divine Empress the most, who had the most right to avenge her, was that person.

Was Xu Yourong.

The Divine Empress had watched her grow up.

It was not the previous Holy Maiden, but the Divine Empress that had enlightened Xu Yourong as a teacher.

It was not Xu Shiji's wife, but the Divine Empress that was Xu Yourong's true mother.

The Divine Empress was a Phoenix, and Xu Yourong was also a Phoenix.

It was not the Princess of Ping, but Xu Yourong that was the Divine Empress's true daughter.

It was not Yu Ren, but Xu Yourong that was the Divine Empress's true successor.

Mo Yu asked, "Do you think that she won't take revenge for the Empress?"

Chen Changsheng remained quiet for a very long time before saying, "She never mentioned these matters."

"Given her relationship with the Empress, you didn't find it strange that she didn't mention this matter even once for three years?"

Mo Yu stared into his eyes. "I watched her grow up. I know how frightening her willpower and execution are."

To not mention or even think about a matter for three years, just how powerful would one's willpower have to be?

If she had a similarly formidable execution, just which step had she reached?

.....

.....

In the drifting snow and the cutting winter winds, Chen Changsheng picked up Xu Yourong and took her to the Hundred Herb Garden.

Underneath the Yellow Paper Umbrella, they walked to the deepest part of the garden.

There was an ordinary forest there. Once, a stone table and stone chairs had been placed here, but only vacant ground was left.

Xu Yourong silently looked at that place.

The Divine Empress was buried there.

In a very, very deep place.

Chapter 1049 – Returning to the Orthodox Academy

Chen Changsheng turned to Xu Yourong.

From the side, she looked very beautiful.

As beautiful as she was from every other angle.

She was as calm as she ever was.

But for some inexplicable reason, Chen Changsheng felt like he saw the chill of autumn on her face.

Perhaps it was because of what Mo Yu said to him yesterday?

Since last night, he had spent a long time thinking and hesitating, and now, he finally asked.

"Do you... want to say something?"

Surprised, Xu Yourong asked, "Say what?"

Both her expression and the way she turned her body to face him were ever so natural.

Chen Changsheng suddenly didn't know how to continue on the topic. His gaze fell on the nearby grass.

A faint smile emerged on Xu Yourong's lips. "You are speaking about the Empress?"

Chen Changsheng nodded.

Her smile faded as she softly said, "She was just like my mother."

Chen Changsheng looked at that place and asked, "Are you prepared to do something?"

Xu Yourong calmly looked at him and said, "Did Mo Yu tell you something last night?"

Chen Changsheng very honestly admitted, "She thinks that you will take revenge for the Divine Empress."

Xu Yourong asked, "You will worry if I do this?"

Chen Changsheng's answer was still honest. "Yes."

Xu Yourong lightly said, "Isn't this something that's more appropriate for her to do? She's the one you should be concerned about."

Chen Changsheng replied, "Last night, she said to me that by killing Zhou Tong, she had returned the affection the Empress had shown to her."

Xu Yourong was quiet for a while, then said, "What's borrowed is returned. That's natural."

Chen Changsheng could not see what she was really thinking, so he asked, "What are you thinking?"

Xu Yourong returned, "And what are you thinking?"

"Although I and Master now treat each other as strangers precisely because of this matter, with regards to this specific matter, I really don't know who's right and who's wrong."

Chen Changsheng added, "If I consider the fact that they all used Zhou Tong, then I think that they are all wrong."

Xu Yourong said, "So you feel that there is no reason to use a mistake to deal with another mistake."

Chen Changsheng replied, "I just find it impossible to convince myself."

Xu Yourong calmly returned, "That's reasonable, but you also don't need to try and convince me, nor do you need to worry about me, because I have not planned to do anything. I cultivate the Great Dao, and the Empress also cultivated the Great Dao. If a strand of her soul in the sea of stars still has awareness, she also would not want me to place my thoughts on these trifling matters."

Chen Changsheng said nothing.

Logically speaking, since Xu Yourong had just worked together

with Shang Xingzhou, Chen Changsheng should have had nothing to worry about. But he still felt that something wasn't right.

Xu Yourong added, "If I really do plan on doing something, I will definitely tell you first. And besides, how would the venerable Daoist fail to notice?"

Chen Changsheng felt a little relieved, because he knew that Xu Yourong would not deceive him.

Xu Yourong ceased discussion on this topic. Looking at the wall in the depths of the forest, she asked, "Is the Orthodox Academy on that side?"

Chen Changsheng was very familiar with this forest. "It's on the other side of the wall."

Since they had gone to the Hundred Herb Garden, they had no reason to not go to the Orthodox Academy.

Chen Changsheng walked over to the wall.

Xu Yourong was a step slower.

Because she had given that patch of grass an extra glance.

Her eyes were very calm.

The Divine Empress was buried, in a very, very deep place.

In her heart, there was also a very, very deep place.

.....

.....

The gray-black wall was rather tall and very old. It was hard to say how many years of wind and rain it had experienced.

But the door in the wall was clearly quite new. From the hinges or the dust in its seams, it couldn't be older than several years.

With the end of the wall out of sight, the sudden appearance of this door in the middle of this gray-black wall looked like a mouth opening in laughter.

Chen Changsheng almost seemed to see that girl pushing open that door and coming through, and he couldn't help but smile.

He pushed upon the door and entered the Orthodox Academy.

There was no wooden basin giving off steam on the other side of the wall.

Tang Thirty-Six had been gone from the Heavenly Dao Academy for many years and now lived in the Orthodox Academy. If he were to once more flee in his soaked and sorry clothes, where he would go to borrow a set of clothes?

That house was still in its original place.

Chen Changsheng had lived in this house for a very long time, so he was quite familiar with it as he walked in.

One could see a room the moment one entered the first floor. This was Zhexiu's.

It was extremely quiet in the room, like nobody was home.

Whether it was the corridors or the frames, everything was the same as it was three years ago.

Su Moyu and Tang Thirty-Six lived on the floor above.

His own room was on the third floor.

The rooms had also not changed, but it was clear that they were regularly cleaned. They could even be described as spotless.

That row of plain Daoist robes in varying shades still hung in his wardrobe. The books were still on his bookshelf and his bed was still neat and tidy.

It was like he had never left, like those three years did not exist.

Xu Yourong pointed at the empty spot on the bookshelf and asked, "Where is that little trinket I gave you when we were little?"

"When I left, I brought it all with me."

Chen Changsheng used his fingers to pick out a very old bamboo

dragonfly.

Xu Yourong carefully took it and placed it on the bookshelf.

Seeing this, Chen Changsheng felt rather warm, but then also a little strange.

He remembered that Xu Yourong shouldn't have visited his room, so how did she know where to put the bamboo dragonfly?

He turned to Xu Yourong, wanting to ask her how she knew.

Xu Yourong's expression was very calm, but there was a faint blush on her cheeks. She preempted him by saying, "It's rather old. I'll make you a new one in the future."

Chen Changsheng knew that he could no longer ask, so he laughed.

Walking out of the house, they crossed a lawn and came to a lake.

The great banyan tree was laden with white snow. It looked very beautiful, but it also made one worry over whether it could endure the cold.

There was a gust of wind. Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong stood on the thick branches of the tree as snow rustled down.

"In the past, would all of you stand here and look at the capital?"

"That's right. We thought that looking at the scenery like this was excellent."

"What's on the other side?"

"A small kitchen. Wuqiong Bi destroyed it later on, and then it was rebuilt. No one is using it now, but I hear that it's still well-stocked with firewood and cooking implements."

"It's just waiting for Xuanyuan Po to come back?"

"Waiting for his next visit to the capital. He should probably be a great general by then."

.....

.....

In the light snow, the capital was very quiet, as was the Orthodox Academy. One could hear a few noises from the distance, and careful listening would reveal that it was many people simultaneously reciting a book.

The Orthodox Academy was very large. In the past, Chen Changsheng had only stayed in a very small part of it, but he knew this had ceased to be the case long ago.

He wanted to go over and see, and Xu Yourong naturally had no objection.

They followed the sounds of studying, passing the library, the gatehouse where Jin Yulu had once roasted three deer, past the finally-repaired fountain, and then they entered a forest.

Most of the Orthodox Academy's buildings were on the other side of this forest.

The sounds of recitation grew louder and louder.

Curiously, the forest seemed quieter and quieter.

They suddenly heard crying from in front of them.

Chen Changsheng looked over.

A youth was leaning on a tree, wiping his tears.

The youth had ordinary clothes. He was no scion of a wealthy family, but he was probably not impoverished.

The youth's face was bruised and swollen. It was clear that he had been beaten by someone.

Xu Yourong was prepared to go and ask.

A flurry of footsteps and a bout of laughter suddenly echoed through the forest.

"Today, I'll definitely beat Xue Yejin through and through!"

"Right, we can't let him run away again."

"Yeah yeah yeah, we'll see if he still dares to show up at our Orthodox Academy!"

In the next chapter, the author admits that he has made a mistake, since Chen Changsheng has already taken Xu Yourong on a tour of the Orthodox Academy. In addition, Chen Changsheng knew that Xu Yourong had visited his room once before, so she should naturally have known where the bamboo dragonfly was. However, for the sake of this romantic part of the story, the author decided not to make any changes.

Chapter 1050 – The New Situation of the Orthodox Academy

The youth heard the voices coming from the forest and an expression of fear appeared on his face. Just as he prepared to leave, he realized that he was too slow.

In a rush of footsteps, ten-some youngsters rushed into the forest and surrounded the youth.

Seeing the youth's bruised face and dust-covered clothes, one of the youngsters showed an expression of contempt and ridicule. Most of the youngsters, on the other hand, began to get excited, their eyes beginning to glow. It seemed like they were intending to beat this youth into an even worse state.

Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong were also in the forest, but they remained undiscovered, screened as they were by several raspberry bushes.

When he saw the youth's miserable appearance, Chen Changsheng's complexion darkened.

When he heard the name of this youth and saw that those youngsters were wearing the academy uniform, his expression further darkened.

The youth used his sleeve to wipe the tears off his face and stammered out, "If you keep doing this, I'll report to the teacher."

"Didn't you already report it last month? And didn't you go just now?"

A young student taunted, "Which teacher would care about you?"

The youth drummed up his courage and said, "His Holiness the Pope has returned! He'll be coming to the Orthodox Academy!"

A few of the young students appeared affected by these words, their eyes showing unease, but this quickly transformed into

viciousness.

A young student harshly rebuked, "You think that with His Holiness returned to the capital, you have a backer? What sort of mighty figure is His Holiness that he would care about these minor concerns? And besides, you're the son of a traitorous minister. You don't have the right to study here!"

A pained expression appeared on the youth's face. He managed to say, "Mother said that His Holiness the Pope let me study here!"

"Can the raving of your mother be trusted? You staying here can only add to the troubles of the Orthodox Academy. We want to drive you away for the Orthodox Academy's sake, and no one would be able to find any fault in us. You also shouldn't blame us for being ruthless. The only person you can blame is your foolish mother."

The young students began to close in around the youth, curses pouring out from their mouths.

Xu Yourong glanced at Chen Changsheng and said, "I'm going to take a stroll around."

After saying this, she left.

She knew that Chen Changsheng did not wish to see these things, nor did he wish anyone else to see them, even if that person was her.

This was a matter of the Orthodox Academy.

The Orthodox Academy belonged to him, to Luoluo, to Xuanyuan Po, to Tang Thirty-Six, and to Su Moyu.

A young student kicked at the youth.

There was a crack as a pebble flew through the air and accurately struck the student on the knee.

The young student bowled over in pain, hollering as he gripped his leg and rolled around.

The other students were deeply alarmed. As they helped their compatriot up, they looked around the forest and yelled, "Who is it?!"

The raspberry bushes rustled as a chill wind blew through them.

Chen Changsheng arrived on the scene. He looked at the youth called Xue Yejin and asked, "You are Divine General Xue's son?"

Hearing 'Divine General Xue' made the youth freeze for a few moments before he could nod.

The young students were all stunned.

On the night of the coup of the Mausoleum of Books, Xue Xingchuan was poisoned to death by Zhou Tong.

As the most powerful general of the Tianhai government, he could not even find peace in death. His body was exposed outside the city for ten-some days.

After three years, whenever Xue Xingchuan was mentioned, no one dared to call him Divine General Xue, or even Lord Xue.

The officers that he had personally raised and his veteran subordinates naturally had very difficult lives under the new government, arduously passing their days in Cong Province.

As for Madam Xue and his heir, who remained in the capital, they also lived very difficult lives. If the Li Palace had not occasionally dispatched people, Mo Yu had not paid a visit twice after her return to the capital with a royal decree, and Prince Chen Liu had not been aiding them in secret, they would have probably been driven out of the Road of Peace ages ago.

But it was very obvious that Young Master Xue was living a very difficult life in the Orthodox Academy as well.

The young students uneasily asked, "Who are you?"

Chen Changsheng ignored them, saying to Xue Yejin, "You should inform a teacher on these matters."

Xue Yejin felt wronged, his eyes reddening as he shakily said, "I did, but the teachers don't care, and then they beat me even worse."

Chen Changsheng thought of what he had heard earlier and confirmed that this really was the case, but... why was this the case?

"If the teachers do not care, you should find somebody that manages the teachers, like Vice Principal Su."

Over the last few years, without him, Luoluo, Tang Thirty-Six, or Zhexiu in the capital, the Orthodox Academy was under the complete management of Su Moyu alone.

Su Moyu was now the Vice Principal of the Orthodox Academy.

Xue Yejin felt even more wronged at these words, thinking to himself, I'm just an ordinary student. It's not like I can meet Principal Su whenever I want.

Chen Changsheng said, "You should tell these things to your mother. Your mother will naturally be able to see him."

Xue Yejin replied, "As a son, how can I worry my mother?"

Chen Changsheng was very pleased by this response. He smiled and said, "Then follow me. I'll bring you to see him."

This said, he walked with Xue Yejin out of the forest.

The ten-some young students wanted to stop him, but they realized that their feet couldn't move, and they did not dare run after the pair.

In their view, though this person seemed not much older than them, he had a serene nobility that could not be overlooked.

The Orthodox Academy was not a place one could enter and exit as one pleased. They were sure that there was no such student amongst them, nor was there any young teacher.

Just who was this person?

A possibility suddenly came to mind.

The student who had had his knee injured by a pebble had been helped up by his comrades and was barely managing to stand. His legs now abruptly went soft and he plopped on the ground.

The other students instantly turned ghastly pale, their faces whiter even than the snow.

.....

.....

Deep within a building in the western part of the Orthodox Academy.

Su Moyu glanced at the teacher in front of him, emotions of disgust and anger flashing in his eyes. He managed to eventually suppress them, turning to the window and saying, "In a little while, an academy meeting will be held. Those students will be reprimanded and punished according to the academy's rules."

The teacher lowered his head as he continuously wiped the sweat from his face. Occasionally, he would raise his head to take a glance at the window.

A young man was standing by the window.

It turned out that the Pope really was this young. It turned out that the Pope really was on good terms with the Xue Estate.

Everyone in the capital knew about Chen Changsheng's involvement in Xue Xingchuan's funeral, but many people believed that it had just been a momentary whim.

The teacher felt deep regret.

Chen Changsheng turned around to look at Su Moyu. His expression was unchanged, but he was mentally a little surprised.

Su Moyu's punishment was a little light, but it was still understandable. He had never wanted his appearance to make this teacher and those students endure an even greater penalty. But he

was perplexed at how this sort of thing could happen in the Orthodox Academy under Su Moyu's calm, upright, stern, and meticulous care.

Su Moyu should have been well aware that Xue Xingchuan's son had entered the Orthodox Academy to study and that this had been arranged by him.

And when discussing the type of punishment to be given, Su Moyu seemed to be facing some sort of difficulty.

This place was the Orthodox Academy. What could be difficult about punishing a teacher and ten-some students?

Chen Changsheng turned to the teacher and suddenly found him rather familiar.

And then, he recalled an old matter.

Three years ago, the Orthodox Academy was surrounded by heavy cavalry. The disciples of South Stream Temple and Su Moyu guarded the gate. Both sides were at a deadlock, and the situation was extremely tense.

Just when Eunuch Lin was preparing to break through the gate, ten-some students and several teachers left the Orthodox Academy through the rear gate.

At the time, Su Moyu had noted down the names of those students and teachers, and Chen Changsheng had also seen this list.

If he was remembering correctly, the teacher in front of him now was one of those people.

This person had returned to the Orthodox Academy?

Had all those teachers and students returned to the Orthodox Academy?

Just what had happened in the Orthodox Academy?

Chen Changsheng turned to Su Moyu and asked, "Who let him

come back?"

Su Moyu knew that he had already recognized the teacher. He sighed and prepared to explain.

"Mei Chuan, Education Overseer of the Orthodox Academy, pays respects to His Holiness the Pope."

A voice came from outside the room.

Chen Changsheng turned to Su Moyu.

Su Moyu nodded, an expression of mixed emotions on his face.

Chapter 1051 – Cutting Off the Hand (I)

"It was me who agreed to let this teacher and those students return.

"As for the Xue clan's child, he reported to me.

"If there is blame to be placed, the blame lies on me. I request Your Holiness the Pope to forgive me."

This succession of statements caused the gaze Chen Changsheng aimed at this bishop called Mei Chuan to change.

Bishop Mei Chuan had a very gentle conversational style, a graceful bearing, a perfect etiquette. Even when facing the Pope, he gave off an aura that was neither servile nor overbearing.

Chen Changsheng felt a sort of familiarity about this person, but there was an even more crucial question—when did the Orthodox Academy get an education overseer?

Su Moyu said, "You are the education overseer, so why is it that when the teacher permitted those students to commit wrongdoings, not only did you not punish him, you even protected him?"

Bishop Mei Chuan calmly replied, "The Orthodox Academy is a holy ground, so how can the child of a treasonous minister be allowed to profane it? My actions were out of consideration for the academy."

Chen Changsheng gazed at Mei Chuan, the familiarity growing clearer and clearer.

Mei Chuan faintly smiled, preparing to continue explaining his thinking.

He appeared very calm, but he was actually rather nervous. After all, his actions were highly likely to offend the Pope.

More importantly, he was preparing to use this matter and his

following words and combine them with the relationship between him and the Pope in an attempt to gain even more benefits.

Regrettably, Chen Changsheng did not give him the chance to continue speaking.

Chen Changsheng had this vague feeling that if he continued to speak with this bishop, he would end up with a result that he would not be willing to accept.

To put it another way, this Bishop Mei Chuan had already prepared the course and tempo of this conversation before showing himself.

Those people most skilled at breaking the course and tempo of a conversation were often the unreasonable and reckless.

Chen Changsheng could not do this, but the Orthodox Academy had never been lacking such an individual.

He asked Su Moyu, "Where is he?"

Su Moyu pointed at the back and said, "He drank too much last night, so he's sleeping inside."

"Wake him up. I recall that this is a matter that should be under the academy superintendent's purview," Chen Changsheng noted.

The Orthodox Academy's superintendent was Tang Thirty-Six.

With regards to 'unreasonable', who was more skilled, and who had more money than him?

Rubbing his eyes and still in his pajamas, Tang Thirty-Six walked into the room. After listening to Su Moyu's summary of the situation, he yawned.

And then he turned to that teacher who allowed the students to beat up and humiliate Xue Yejin. He said one word: "Scram."

It wasn't a very loud voice, and it was certainly no thunderclap, but it was very crisp, like biting into a radish after soaking it in water for an entire night.

Sweat instantly began to gush from the teacher's pores. A single glance to Bishop Mei Chuan was the only delay he permitted himself before quickly retreating.

Three years ago, he had been a teacher of the Orthodox Academy, so he was well aware of the superintendent's temper.

If he did not quickly leave now and flee the Orthodox Academy, he probably wouldn't have a chance to flee for the rest of his life.

Mei Chuan slightly raised his brows, apparently surprised to see that the young master of the Tang clan had such renown in the Orthodox Academy.

Tang Thirty-Six turned to him.

Bishop Mei Chuan had already prepared himself. Upon being told to scram, he already knew how he should smile in order to appear like he didn't mind.

However, Tang Thirty-Six did not say 'scram', but instead asked, "Who are you?"

It was quite a while before Mei Chuan gathered his senses and replied, "I am the education overseer for the Orthodox Academy."

Tang Thirty-Six asked, "When did the Orthodox Academy get an education overseer? How come even I didn't know?"

Since he could be dispatched by the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education as an education overseer for as important a place as the Orthodox Academy, Bishop Mei Chuan undoubtedly had an unusual background.

So Tang Thirty-Six was not prepared to ask about his background, nor did he intend to give him a chance to say it.

This was precisely the reason Chen Changsheng had him appear.

But Mei Chuan's reaction was faster than had been imagined.

He ignored Tang Thirty-Six, turning to Chen Changsheng and saying, "The deceased Archbishop Mei Lisha is my uncle on my

father's side."

He was Mei Lisha's nephew.

As expected.

Chen Changsheng's speculations had received proof, and he naturally understood why Su Moyu had been in such a difficult situation.

The entire continent knew of Mei Lisha's relationship with him and the Orthodox Academy.

The room was quiet for a very long time.

"I only want to ask one question."

Tang Thirty-Six looked at Mei Chuan and asked, "Why did you agree to the return of those teachers and students?"

Mei Chuan's expression did not change. He calmly replied, "The decisions of the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education must comply with His Majesty's decrees."

This statement was not wrong.

The Orthodox Academy was one of the Six Ivies, under the direct administration of the Li Palace. However, it was still in the capital, on the territory of the Great Zhou.

But anyone could tell that this was not simply the emperor's decree. It could only be Shang Xingzhou's intent.

"I understand."

Tang Thirty-Six appeared very calm. He said to Mei Chuan, "Might I trouble Your Excellency to leave for the moment so that we might discuss?"

Mei Chuan smiled. "Of course."

He bowed to Chen Changsheng and left.

The room once more welcomed a protracted silence.

Tang Thirty-Six looked at Chen Changsheng.

Chen Changsheng said nothing.

Mo Yu had never mentioned these matters in her letters. After all, she was not a member of the Orthodoxy, so it was impossible for her to know of the undercurrent lurking beneath its waters.

But all of them understood that the problem lay within the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education.

The Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education administered the Six Ivies and was the most important of the Li Palace's Sacred Halls, possessing an exceptionally unique status in the Orthodoxy.

Its last two administrators had been the most experienced and most honored of archbishops, Mei Lisha and Mao Qiuyu.

The Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education had always belonged to the Orthodoxy's conservative faction, locked in a struggle with the Orthodoxy's new faction, led by Linghai Zhiwang and Daoist Siyuan, for many years.

In the rebirth of the Orthodox Academy, the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education and the deceased Archbishop Mei Lisha had played extremely important roles.

In the view of the common people, the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education should have supported the Orthodox Academy and the now-Pope Chen Changsheng, just like they had done in the past.

Yet Chen Changsheng knew that this was not the case at all.

The reason the Orthodoxy's conservative faction had supported the Orthodox Academy was not him, but his teacher.

Put bluntly, they had always supported his teacher.

To them, the Orthodox Academy had never been Chen Changsheng's, and certainly not Tang Thirty-Six's or any of those other youngsters'.

From start to finish, the Orthodox Academy was Shang

Xingzhou's and their martyred friends'.

In the three years that Chen Changsheng was gone from the capital, the Li Palace had sealed itself away, making it hard for anyone to stretch a hand inside.

But the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education was outside the Li Palace, under the jurisdiction of Shang Xingzhou's renown and methods. The control the Orthodoxy's conservative faction wielded over the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education grew stronger and stronger.

They naturally wanted to take back control of the Orthodox Academy. At worst, they wanted to at least regain their influence over it.

It was no easy feat for Su Moyu to last until now.

Tang Thirty-Six asked Su Moyu, "Principal Mao?"

This was the problem he was most concerned about.

Su Moyu replied, "Principal Mao has already been in seclusion for some time. These matters probably have nothing to do with him."

At this answer, both Tang Thirty-Six and Chen Changsheng sighed in relief.

But the problem facing the Orthodox Academy was still very difficult to address.

The strategy of the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education, of Shang Xingzhou, was very shrewd, the person that they had chosen very difficult to handle.

Not even Tang Thirty-Six could order that person to scram.

After all, Mei Chuan was a relative of Mei Lisha.

Tang Thirty-Six looked at Chen Changsheng and declared, "But this place is the Orthodox Academy."

Chen Changsheng thought for a very long time. Finally, he said,

"Yes."

Tang Thirty-Six added, "I didn't have him scram because I knew that there would be no meaning to it."

Chen Changsheng silently thought some more, then said, "Yes."

Tang Thirty-Six turned and walked out of the room.

Su Moyu had an inkling of what Tang Thirty-Six planned to do. His expression suddenly changed and he rose, preparing to stop him.

But Chen Changsheng said nothing.

In a trembling voice, Su Moyu asked, "Is this really necessary?"

Chapter 1052 – Cutting Off the Hand (II)

Before Tang Thirty-Six could find him, Bishop Mei Chuan encountered Xu Yourong in the forest.

He had never met Xu Yourong, but he knew who she was.

In the past, Tang Thirty-Six had said in this same forest that she truly was very beautiful, and it was still true.

Mei Chuan was somewhat surprised, but his manners and bearing remained impeccable.

He was also surprised to learn that Xu Yourong knew he was the new education overseer for the Orthodox Academy, and she also knew of his relationship with Mei Lisha.

As a result, Mei Chuan could not be sure that this meeting was an accident.

Xu Yourong said to Bishop Mei Chuan, "The Orthodox Academy is very important to them."

Mei Chuan humbly replied, "This lowly servant knows."

Xu Yourong said, "But you do not understand what they are willing to do for the sake of the Orthodox Academy."

"Superintendent Tang ordered that teacher to scram. I can presume that the teacher will no longer dare to come to the Orthodox Academy."

Mei Chuan sighed, "He taught the elementary course on the Essay on the Origin of the Dao rather well."

Xu Yourong asked, "Tang Tang did not have you scram?"

Mei Chuan paused for a moment, then deferentially answered, "No."

Xu Yourong was quiet for a while, then said, "So this is how it is."

Mei Chuan looked a little surprised.

Xu Yourong softly explained, "He did not have you scram, so it means that he wants you to die."

Mei Chuan's expression flickered.

Xu Yourong shook her head. "I feel like it's wrong for them to do this."

Mei Chuan's nerves slightly relaxed.

"This is the Orthodox Academy and you are an education overseer sent by the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education. If they touch you, they won't be able to give a good explanation to the priests and believers."

Xu Yourong calmly stared at him. "But I don't need to explain."

Mei Chuan's mind, which had just slightly relaxed, tensed up once more.

"My Lady's meaning is?"

"My meaning is that since I don't need to give an explanation, the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education won't dare to demand an explanation of me, so I might as well be the one to kill you."

A wind flitting through the forest caused the snow burdening the raspberry bushes to rustle, and her sleeves to drift in the wind.

Her eyes had their normal serenity and softness. There were no negative emotions within them, and certainly no killing intent.

In confusion, Mei Chuan sought one last sliver of hope and asked, "My Lady wishes to kill me?"

"If you were just the Education Overseer of the Orthodox Academy, I would not care, but you are Mei Lisha's nephew, so it's best if I personally kill you."

Xu Yourong remained so calm that it seemed like she was not speaking of killing someone, but discussing interpretations of the Heavenly Tome Monoliths.

This composure made Bishop Mei Chuan feel an unprecedented fear and cold, so much so that even his voice began to tremble.

If Xu Yourong really did kill him, much less the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education, what could even the Li Palace or the Imperial Court do?

Could the Li Palace or the Imperial Court possibly demand that the Holy Maiden of the south pay her life for one bishop?

"If My Lady kills me in the Orthodox Academy, the unification of the Orthodoxy pushed by My Lady and His Holiness will be greatly affected."

Mei Chuan's voice was shaky, but his expression was extremely sincere, as if he was only worried about Xu Yourong.

Xu Yourong's response was extremely indifferent and simultaneously terrifying.

"I do not care."

By the time she finished, the temple sword was in her hand.

Mei Chuan's pupils constricted while his right hand rose up like a drifting cloud to block. At the same time, his body began to blur as he made to escape.

Too late.

Squelch.

Mei Chuan's right hand flew off his wrist.

The temple sword stabbed through his chest.

With a buzz, ten-some small flames, like wild plums, drifted out from the temple sword.

These were the true flames of the Heavenly Phoenix.

All life would become extinct upon touching these flames.

Bishop Mei Chuan was a Star Condensation expert, but in front of Xu Yourong, he could not even momentarily block her, much

less think about winning.

The gap between the two was too great.

More importantly, even when the temple sword was about to bestow death upon him, he still did not believe Xu Yourong would kill him.

He did not represent only himself.

He was the education overseer sent by the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education.

He represented the collective will of the Orthodoxy's conservative faction.

He was just like a hand that Shang Xingzhou had extended into the Orthodox Academy.

Even if you're the Holy Maiden of the south, before this hand, shouldn't you negotiate, with both sides yielding ground and eventually reaching a compromise?

Mei Chuan found all this absurd. His pale face was covered in disbelief.

He fell onto the snow, vomiting blood and gradually ceasing to breathe.

In the silence of the forest, a voice rose, one with many complicated emotions.

"Even if you were the one to kill him, you will have to give a reason eventually."

Xu Yourong calmly replied, "I said before that I did not care. I only need to let people know that I was the one who killed him."

The person sighed, "No wonder you arranged to meet me here."

Xu Yourong replied, "Yes, it was so you could see it."

Upon learning of the matter, she had decided to kill Bishop Mei Chuan, resulting in her visit to the Orthodox Academy. She had

even arranged for that person to come to the forest.

She just hadn't expected Chen Changsheng to meet the bishop before she could kill him, which was sure to cause some trouble.

"Yes, this prince has seen it."

A young man walked out from the trees.

He wore a prince's robe and had a lively and handsome face. Compared to the past, he was much more graceful and noble.

Prince Chen Liu.

His father, the Prince of Xiang, was the most powerful prince of the Great Zhou Imperial Court and now, after breaking into the Divine, had an even more distinguished position.

And as the only member of the Chen Imperial clan who had remained to stand guard in the capital, Prince Chen Liu had always had a unique status.

Coupled with the rumor that Shang Xingzhou admired him, Prince Chen Liu was unquestionably the most popular person in the capital.

But to Xu Yourong, he was still that companion she had studied with in the Imperial Palace ten-some years ago.

Prince Chen Liu thought the same of her.

So when he saw her kill Bishop Mei Chuan, his thoughts did not dwell on how to handle this matter, but on her thoughts.

"I didn't expect you to have such a deep affection for Chen Changsheng."

Prince Chen Liu ruefully sighed, "Back then, I would have never thought that you would do so much for a man."

Bishop Mei Chuan was a hand that Shang Xingzhou had extended into the Orthodox Academy.

How should one handle it? Any suitably cool-headed and

intelligent person would know that this hand had to be cut off.

But the relationship between Mei Chuan and Mei Lisha made the matter extremely complicated.

Shang Xingzhou's status in the Imperial Court and the Orthodoxy was too high.

If Chen Changsheng wanted to contend against his teacher, he not only needed his status as Pope. He also needed to continuously increase his prestige.

Prestige originated from one's cultivation level and strength, but it was also related to one's reputation.

The Li Palace's advocacy and the influence of fervent believers like An Hua had caused Chen Changsheng's reputation in the continent to climb higher and higher.

This reputation came from the Cinnabar Pill, from his assault of myriad swords on the battlefield three years ago, and the falling boulder from White Emperor City.

Accruing such reputation had required Chen Changsheng's sweat and blood, his impeccable virtue, and a very long time.

Killing a relative of Mei Lisha would deal a severe blow to his reputation.

To use a cruder phrase: it would dirty his hands.

Xu Yourong knew that Chen Changsheng was in a difficult spot.

She guessed that Tang Thirty-Six would not put Chen Changsheng in this difficult spot.

But Tang Thirty-Six was also a member of the Orthodox Academy.

When she was walking along the lake and appreciating the view from atop the banyan tree, she had felt a very light regret over not being able to participate in this part of Chen Changsheng's life.

Now that she thought about it, this was a blessing.

She was not a member of the Orthodox Academy.

She could kill.

The cry of a crane alarmed the entire Orthodox Academy.

Snow rustled down from the tree branches.

Several dozen teachers and students emerged from the classrooms. They looked to where the crane cry originated from and then walked into the forest.

Several screams came from the forest.

Chapter 1053 – The Declaration of the New Orthodox Academy

Tang Thirty-Six came a little late.

He had gone back to the house to get a sword and then detoured through quiet corridors and the sea of bamboo, so by the time he got to the forest, it was already packed with people.

The raspberry bushes were in a terrible state from having been stepped on. On the snow, surrounded by the crowd, was Bishop Mei Chuan's corpse, as well as a few striking bloodstains.

Upon seeing this sight, he very naturally put away the Wenshui Sword and asked a teacher, "What's going on here?"

The teacher had a pale complexion as he said in a shaky voice, "I heard that the education overseer disrespected the Holy Maiden... so..."

Tang Thirty-Six was startled for a moment. He did not know that Xu Yourong had also come to the Orthodox Academy, and he certainly had not expected her to kill Mei Chuan.

He asked, "And the Holy Maiden?"

"She already left." The teacher believed that Tang Thirty-Six did not believe his words, so he hurriedly added, "Prince Chen Liu was also present. He was a witness."

Tang Thirty-Six did not understand why that young prince that he so loathed would come to the Orthodox Academy. Did he have an appointment with Xu Yourong?

He gazed at Mei Chuan's body and perked his brows as he said, "So it's like that. Then he really should have died."

Su Moyu's voice came from outside the forest, so the teachers and students hurriedly dispersed.

At some point, Chen Changsheng had also arrived.

He gazed silently at Mei Chuan's corpse for a very long time.

Tang Thirty-Six asked, "When do you plan to go back to the Li Palace?"

The Pope naturally had to return to the Li Palace.

He could not push off this moment forever.

When Chen Changsheng returned to the Li Palace, he would have to directly confront the internal problems within the Orthodoxy.

The death of Bishop Mei Chuan would not make the problems simpler, only make the methods used to resolve them simpler.

From a certain perspective, Xu Yourong had already made the choice for Chen Changsheng.

On the side, Su Moyu said, "The Congregation of Light will be held tonight."

Tang Thirty-Six asked, "What will the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education's response be?"

Su Moyu said, "Ever since Principal Mao entered seclusion, the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education has been managed by three cardinals."

Tang Thirty-Six asked, "All of them from that side?"

Su Moyu affirmed, "Yes."

There was a pause, then Tang Thirty-Six said, "Then we can't pick from them."

Both Chen Changsheng and Su Moyu understood what he meant.

Mao Qiuyu was very close to breaking into the divine. In several dozen days, or perhaps even less time, he might succeed.

According to the Orthodoxy's customs, when that time came, Mao Qiuyu would be formally bestowed a holy name. His status would become even more esteemed, but he could no longer be the

Archbishop of the Hall of Illustrious Persons or assume any other official post.

Anyone could understand the reason for this.

The problem now was just who the incredibly important position of Archbishop of the Hall of Illustrious Persons would be given to.

"If we exclude those three extremely senior cardinals, the most qualified to administer the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education is Principal Zhuang."

Chen Changsheng and Tang Thirty-Six fell into quiet thought.

The Principal Zhuang mentioned by Su Moyu was the current Principal of the Heavenly Dao Academy, Zhuang Zhihuan.

The Heavenly Dao Academy had a very high status within the Orthodoxy, and Zhuang Zhihuan himself was sufficiently qualified in terms of both cultivation and seniority. Moreover, he had always been highly regarded by Mao Qiuyu.

Although the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education belonged to the conservative faction, Zhuang Zhihuan had maintained an impartial and neutral stance in these last few years, efficiently carrying out the assignments given to him by the Li Palace.

From every angle, he was the best choice to be Mao Qiuyu's successor, and Chen Changsheng also had no objection.

But everyone knew how his son, Zhuang Huanyu, had died.

Tang Thirty-Six wanted to object, but he found himself unable to speak. Zhuang Zhihuan was a good friend of his parents, and when he first arrived at the capital, he had been under his care.

Chen Changsheng brought Xue Yejin with him and left the Orthodox Academy, but Tang Thirty-Six remained to handle the aftermath.

He had someone deliver Mei Chuan's corpse to the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education and then called a meeting of all of the

Orthodox Academy's teachers and students.

Su Moyu took out a rather old sheet of paper and passed it to Tang Thirty-Six.

It was a list that had been written out three years ago.

Tang Thirty-Six looked at the names on the paper and complained, "Why is it that when it comes to offending people, the job is always given to me?"

"Because you're skilled in offending people and aren't afraid of offending them." Su Moyu earnestly added, "And you like doing this sort of thing."

Tang Thirty-Six pondered this explanation, then concluded, "Although these words sound like you're trying to piss me off, after carefully thinking about it, they truly do have some basis."

The gathered teachers and students of the Orthodox Academy stood in the stone plaza in front of the academy gate, nervously listening to this conversation.

The Pope had visited the Orthodox Academy and the Holy Maiden had killed the education overseer. Anyone could see that something was happening in the Orthodox Academy today.

Just what did Vice Principal Su and the long-absent superintendent plan to do?

Tang Thirty-Six began to read names off the list.

"Zhang Lintao.

"Huang Zecheng.

"He Shuyu.

"Guo Xin.

"Lu You."

.....

.....

The teachers and students called out by Tang Thirty-Six began to walk out from the crowd, their faces pale and fraught with anxiety.

Three years ago, in the most dangerous moment of the Orthodox Academy, they had chosen to leave. Afterward, they were given permission by the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education to return.

They did not know what Tang Thirty-Six would do to them.

"Go already; what are you standing around for?"

Tang Thirty-Six suddenly felt rather uninterested, adding, "In the future, don't let me see your faces in the Orthodox Academy again."

The ten-some teachers and students lowered their heads as they walked out of the academy, their faces sullen. Although they were somewhat reluctant, they did not dare express it.

Tang Thirty-Six suddenly remembered something and said, "Teachers, remember to return all the salary that you've been paid tomorrow."

These words caused the legs of those teachers walking toward the academy gate to go soft.

One of the banished students finally couldn't help but speak out in anger, "Then will you also be returning our tuition fees?"

Tang Thirty-Six smiled at the student and said, "If you dare to accept it."

Several of the teachers were scared out of their wits. They hurriedly grabbed the student and dragged him out of the academy, afraid that Tang Thirty-Six would change his mind if they were too slow.

Outside the Orthodox Academy, Hundred Flowers Lane, which was normally already quite lively, was packed with spectators today.

Seeing those dejected teachers and students being banished from

the Orthodox Academy, especially two of the younger students, who were weeping nonstop, the crowd could not help but feel a little sympathetic.

Tang Thirty-Six had never left any room for error in his actions, so he could not possibly miss out on this detail. He had long ago sent a smart and eloquent teacher to stand at the academy gate and loudly recount the reason these teachers and students were being expelled, recounting the siege of the Orthodox Academy from three years ago so vividly that the crowd felt like they could see it taking place right before their eyes.

The gazes aimed by the crowd at those teachers and students instantly changed, and some of them even cursed and spat in front of them.

Tang Thirty-Six did not much care how miserable the future lives of these teachers and students would be.

He was extremely aware that neither the five other Ivy Academies nor any of the ordinary academies would dare to take these people in.

He was more concerned over the fact that the current Orthodox Academy was not the Orthodox Academy from three years ago, and it was still not the Orthodox Academy that he and Chen Changsheng wanted to see.

The gates closed, blocking off the cursing and chatting from Hundred Flowers Lane. Drifting snowflakes fell over the abnormally silent campus.

A hundred-some teachers and students stood in the snow, not moving a muscle.

Tang Thirty-Six was rather pleased to see this.

"Several years ago, when His Holiness the Pope walked into Hundred Flowers Lane, this place was very quiet. The name 'Orthodox Academy' was completely covered in ivy, the school was

awash in weeds, and broken walls could be spotted wherever one looked. This place was even more peaceful than the outside, the peace of death. The Orthodox Academy of that time was truthfully just a grave."

He gazed at the teachers and students and said, "Later on, Princess Luoluo, Xuanyuan Po, and then I came one after the other, and this place gradually began to come to life. I can say without shame that we and His Holiness the Pope changed all this, let the Orthodox Academy gain a new life."

Su Moyu felt rather emotional as he thought of those stories from back then.

Tang Thirty-Six added, "Since it is a new life, it naturally isn't the old one."

The teachers and students stared at him in a daze, unclear as to what he meant by those words.

"I hope that all of you can understand this point."

Tang Thirty-Six had a calm and firm expression.

"The current Orthodox Academy and the Orthodox Academy from several decades ago... have nothing to do with each other."

Chapter 1054 – The Return of the Pope

The Orthodox Academy was one of the Six Ivies and had an extremely long history. For a time, it had prospered and flourished to incredible levels within the capital.

Twenty-some years ago, a bloody incident took place in the Orthodox Academy, with countless teachers and students dying. From that day, the Orthodox Academy became a graveyard, left to gradually fade away in the flow of history. Those people of the capital who still remembered did not dare mention it.

Only when Chen Changsheng came from Xining Village to the capital did the Orthodox Academy once more appear in the world.

And there was the coup of the Mausoleum of Books.

The status of the Orthodox Academy now was very special.

Both the Imperial Court and the Li Palace treated the Orthodox Academy extremely well.

Countless resources of all types flowed in an unending stream into that place deep within Hundred Flowers Lane.

In a short three years, the Orthodox Academy had regained its former grandeur, its status beginning to surpass that of the other Ivy Academies and on the verge of standing level with the Heavenly Dao Academy. Otherwise, why would those teachers and students who had once fled waste so much strength in an attempt to return?

History had always been written by the victors, and glory would always belong only to that person who stood at the very peak of the Mausoleum of Books.

The Orthodox Academy had been reborn and regained its glory because of Chen Changsheng. He still held the post of Principal of the Orthodox Academy. But many people believed that the Orthodox Academy was still Shang Xingzhou's Orthodox Academy.

The brilliance of the Orthodox Academy in the Grand Examination and in the Mausoleum of Books had also been attributed by many to Shang Xingzhou.

Because Shang Xingzhou was the most important and most influential principal in the history of the Orthodox Academy.

And Chen Changsheng was his student.

His journey from Xining to the capital, his entry into the Orthodox Academy, and everything else had all been arranged by Shang Xingzhou.

This was an extremely explicit lineage.

The scholars of the Imperial Court had written all sorts of fine essays about it.

The Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education had even prepared to set up a stele outside the academy gate to record this period of history.

To the Orthodoxy's conservative faction, this was just a return to the fundamentals.

To the Orthodox Academy, this was unquestionably an erosion.

If not for Su Moyu's staunch defense, if not for the Li Palace's unending vigilance, if not for the certain restrictions Mao Qiuyu had placed on the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education before entering seclusion, perhaps the marks that Chen Changsheng had left on the Orthodox Academy would have already been wiped clean.

At this time, Chen Changsheng returned to the capital.

The hand that the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education had extended into the Orthodox Academy had been calmly cut off by Xu Yourong.

Tang Thirty-Six had made a declaration to the capital and the entire continent.

It was a declaration as forceful as a thunderclap, exploding in the snowstorm and swiftly spreading to every nook and cranny of the

capital.

The current Orthodox Academy had cleanly and resolutely cut itself off from the old Orthodox Academy.

Upon hearing this news, the pacifistic faction that had hoped for Shang Xingzhou and Chen Changsheng to make amends was deeply disappointed. Those ambitious individuals who hoped to see the teacher and disciple continue to clash, and even hoped to gain some benefits for themselves in the conflict, were also deeply shocked.

Because the Orthodox Academy's stance had been too firm.

One could criticize this as not understanding the principle of respecting one's teacher, and one could even go so far as to criticize this as deceiving one's teachers and betraying one's ancestors.

But what sort of person was Tang Thirty-Six?

In his months within the ancestral hall, he had earnestly set about creating a cold and insidious plan to overturn the entire Tang clan.

He simply didn't care.

As for whether he could make a decision for the Orthodox Academy, whether he could make a decision for Chen Changsheng, that was another question.

Many people believed that this had always been Chen Changsheng's intention.

.....

.....

Chen Changsheng did not know that Tang Thirty-Six would say such things once he left the Orthodox Academy. He also did not have such intentions, because he simply had not imagined the sort of effect the ownership of the Orthodox Academy would have on the situation.

But upon learning of this matter, he was not surprised, and he certainly did not object.

He and Tang Thirty-Six had not communicated on this matter beforehand, but in the last few years, whether it was by the lake or on the great banyan tree, they had talked far too many times, discussed far too many futures. In every future that they sketched out, the Orthodox Academy was in all of them.

And he also knew that Tang Thirty-Six was helping him make a choice.

Xu Yourong, by killing Bishop Mei Chuan in the Orthodox Academy, had also been helping him make a choice.

Making a choice was one of the world's most difficult and most painful of tasks.

Xu Yourong and Tang Thirty-Six were the two people closest to him beneath the starry sky.

They knew what he thought, so they wanted to take a share of this pain.

However, when he thought of Mo Yu's words from last night, Chen Changsheng felt both touched and dejected.

Dejection would often affect one's appetite.

The food on the plate was alluring in both looks and smell, but tasteless on his tongue.

He put down his chopsticks.

"Were the flower-scented mushrooms not good?"

A beautiful woman nervously asked, "There's also a meatball soup in the kitchen. Does Your Holiness want to try it?"

Xue Yejin had a rather nervous expression.

The woman was Xue Xingchuan's oldest daughter, Xue Yejin's older sister.

After Xue Xingchuan's death, she was beaten by her power-hungry husband, Assistant Minister Wei, after which she took temporary refuge in the Xue Estate.

On that day later on, when wind and snow shrouded the streets of the capital, Assistant Minister Wei had been beheaded by Wang Po and Chen Changsheng.

She had spent the last few years living in the Xue Estate. Nothing remained of her former delicacy, a fact easily confirmed from her cloth garments and the thin calluses on her fingers.

In the eyes of others, this sort of transformation might have engendered heartache and sorrow, but Chen Changsheng found them rather pleasing.

He liked people who lived life seriously, liked those people who would never get sad, no matter what circumstances they were in.

"It was very good," he earnestly said. "The soup also tastes very good, but I have a lot to think about today, so it's easy for my mind to wander."

At these words, both Lady Xue and Xue Yejin smiled.

Madam Xue did not smile, as she knew of what had happened in the Orthodox Academy. She also knew that Chen Changsheng was certain to face many troubles with his return to the Orthodox Academy. She somewhat uneasily said, "Your Holiness has many important matters to take care of and truly does not need to come and see us. This is truly too much."

"There truly are many things to do."

Chen Changsheng took stock of the sun's position, then rose and bid farewell.

The three people of the Xue clan did not dare delay him, and hurriedly sent him off.

The old butler and a servant woman were waiting with the most

respectful of attitudes by the estate gate.

These were the only servants the Xue Estate had at the moment. They and the three members of the Xue clan now lived in the smallest courtyard, on the eastern part of the estate grounds.

The Imperial Court had never issued a decree declaring the reappropriation of the Xue clan's residence, but several princes had been keeping watch on it the entire time.

Chen Changsheng gazed at the ten-some princely estates lining the street as he thought of these things.

Darkness was approaching, but those estates had all inexplicably opened their gates.

The light spilling out from inside shone upon the drifting snowflakes, making them seem like beautiful golden sparks.

Chen Changsheng walked through the snowstorm.

He had heard from Zhexiu and Mo Yu that Zhou Tong had crawled through this very street.

On that night, no matter how much Zhou Tong screamed or begged for mercy, no one came from those princely estates to save him.

Even though he was no longer the Tianhai Divine Empress's dog and was now Shang Xingzhou's dog.

By now, the entire capital knew that Chen Changsheng had entered the Xue Estate. Those princes naturally knew as well.

Would those princes do anything?

No one came out, nor did anyone make a sound.

The snow-covered street was absolutely serene. All was at peace.

Once one walked past the brightly-lit princely estates, one arrived at an ordinary street.

The street was lined with packed crowds of ordinary people.

All the people of the capital were believers of the Orthodoxy. Upon seeing him, they quickly kneeled, making the crowd seem like a tide.

There were no priests at his side, no cavalry to escort him. There were no attendants and no holy carriage.

He walked forward alone.

Wherever he walked, the people kneeled, piously beseeching him for his blessing.

The black tide continued to beat forward along the street until it finally drowned out those famous stone pillars.

Chen Changsheng stood in front of the stone pillars, gazing pensively at those majestic, grandiose, and holy palaces.

A bell suddenly rang from deep within that collection of palaces. Because the Pope had returned.

Chapter 1055 – A Sage's Time

Beyond the stone pillars was the Divine Avenue leading into the heart of the Li Palace.

The teachers and students of the Li Palace Academy, the Temple Seminary, and the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green lined the avenue, bowing in respect.

Chen Changsheng did not spend time reminiscing on the stories that had taken place on this Divine Avenue. He continued forward.

He climbed the long flight of steps, walked past the Hall of Pure Virtue, and finally reached the quiet and secluded hall.

The night sky was cut into the mouth of a well by the roof, just like it had always been, but there was no more wooden ladle by the pool of water, as the Green Leaf was no longer there.

An Hua prostrated in respect, her white robes blown about in the chilly night winds, as agitated as her heart.

Chen Changsheng nodded in greeting and had her rise.

An Hua walked behind him and helped him put on the Divine Robe, then spent a great deal of time making sure everything was perfect.

Chen Changsheng gazed up at that narrow window into the sky, looked up at the countless stars in the bottom of the well, and he recalled his comprehensions when he looked at the sea of stars in White Emperor City.

After some time, he looked away and said, "Let's go."

Accompanied by the soft gurgling of water that could purify one's heart, he walked to the deepest part of the secluded hall, to the stone wall.

The stone wall slowly parted and blazing light spilled out, along with the endless splashing of waves.

This splashing of waves was the sound of clothes chafing as one kneeled, of the excited crowd, of solemn praises to the divine.

"Paying respects to His Holiness the Pope."

Countless priests kneeled on the ground, appearing just like a tide.

Divine Crown on head and Divine Staff in hand, Chen Changsheng serenely regarded the sight before him.

Starting from that small village at the foot of Mount Han, this sort of sight had begun to appear more and more.

As it was commonly described: like a tide.

None of this was fresh to him anymore.

He had gotten used to seeing the sea of people.

And this was not his first time standing here.

He stood on the platform within the Great Hall of Light.

This place was certainly not the highest place in the Li Palace, but it was certainly the highest and most unreachable position in the continent.

This place was only ten-some stone steps from the ground, but they might as well have been countless li, and the place he stood the Divine Kingdom in the sea of stars.

As the pious praises of the divine and recitation of scripture continued, a dignified and divine atmosphere enveloped all of the Great Hall of Light.

Warm Sacred Light illuminated everything within the hall in startling detail. Even the finest sliver of darkness could not exist here.

A massive stone hall existed within the Great Hall of Light.

The images of past sages, heroes, knights, and Saints were carved on this wall. Every detail was revealed under the Sacred Light,

making them seem to come to life.

The sages, heroes, knights, and Saints of the past looked down over the people of the world.

Their gazes were not ones of indifference, but contained many real emotions.

Chen Changsheng stood in front of the stone, stood within the Sacred Light.

He bore those gazes.

He gazed at the people of the world.

This sight was incomparably divine.

.....

.....

Chen Changsheng raised the Divine Staff.

The recitation gradually ceased and the priests slowly began to rise, again like a tide.

The Great Hall of Light suddenly turned quiet. It was even possible for everyone in the hall to hear the wisps of winds that had somehow managed to make it past the array brush against the walls.

Perhaps it was because when the Divine Staff dropped back down, the sea of people in the hall divided into two.

Linghai Zhiwang, Archbishop An Lin, Daoist Siyuan, and Hu Thirty-Two, the four Prefects of the Orthodoxy, stood on the right.

Several hundred Li Palace bishops and the bishops who had hurried back from the various Daoist churches stood behind them.

Far fewer bishops stood on the other side, and there was not a single Sacred Hall archbishop, but there were many cardinals.

The one common trait shared by these bishops was that they all had rather elderly faces.

No matter where one was, this elderly appearance signified years and seniority, and was in itself a sort of power.

The bishops of the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education were amongst this crowd. More importantly, so was everyone from the Heavenly Dao Academy, the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green, and the Temple Seminary.

Only the Li Palace Academy, over which Linghai Zhiwang wielded massive influence, stood on the right. Its principal and Su Moyu stood in the crowd, intentionally maintaining a low profile.

Zhuang Zhihuan and the three bishops heading the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education stood at the front of their crowd, making no attempts to hide their thoughts.

Chen Changsheng glanced at Zhuang Zhihuan, then he looked at a certain place outside the hall.

The Sacred Light enveloped the entire hall, and some of it fell outside as well.

A hole had been torn in the heavy darkness outside the hall, revealing a certain place.

Bishop Mei Chuan was there.

No matter how warm the Sacred Light was, it could never drive away the chill on his body.

Because he was dead.

.....

.....

Back then, when Chen Changsheng became Pope, he was almost immediately driven out of the capital by Shang Xingzhou.

He was the first exiled Pope.

Three years later, he returned to the Li Palace, and in the first Congregation of Light he presided over as Pope, he had to face an

extremely thorny problem.

The priests of the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education, Zhuang Zhihuan, and those elderly cardinals were all looking at him.

Rage and sorrow could clearly be seen in the eyes of these bishops of the conservative faction.

Of course, they still maintained sufficient respect for Chen Changsheng, still kept their emotions under excellent restraint.

Or else Mei Chuan's corpse would not have been outside the hall, but within the Great Hall of Light, displayed right in front of them.

Linghai Zhiwang impassively looked to that side, his eyes extremely cold and his complexion rather dark.

Since the moment he learned of what had happened in the Orthodox Academy, he had kept a close watch on the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education and these elderly priests.

He had not expected them to actually transport Mei Chuan's corpse into the Li Palace and even display it outside the Great Hall of Light.

He took this as a naked challenge to himself. Of course, it was also a warning.

This meant that the Li Palace was not a monolithic whole.

The strength of the Orthodoxy's conservative faction still could not be underestimated. Some people still might be supporting them from the shadows.

Linghai Zhiwang narrowed his eyes, his gaze moving back and forth between Hu Thirty-Two and Archbishop An Lin as he wondered, just which one of them is it?

Tonight was the Pope's first Congregation of Light. For something like this to occur was a great disrespect that he could not accept.

But he knew that it was not convenient for him to do anything

right now, and he certainly could not have somebody take Mei Chuan's body away.

Too many people were watching, and a method of resolution that was too crude might cause some of the priests to lose control.

Of course, he was confident that by borrowing the Pope's prestige and his own status, he could forcefully suppress the situation.

The problem was that the fissure would not disappear. On the contrary, it would only get deeper and deeper.

It was clear that this was not what the Pope wanted.

Linghai Zhiwang turned to Chen Changsheng, suddenly somewhat expectant.

Many bishops in the hall were seeing Chen Changsheng for the first time. They had no opinion on the struggle between the new and conservative. They were also curious, expectant.

How would the Pope resolve this matter?

Yes, it was the Holy Maiden that had killed Bishop Mei Chuan. Prince Chen Liu had played witness to the entire thing.

Everyone knew of the relationship between the Holy Maiden and the Pope. She helped His Holiness make a choice, so she naturally must have prepared a reason for His Holiness.

Logically speaking, Chen Changsheng would only need to speak this reason to resolve the entire matter.

But for some inexplicable reason, many of the priests, including Linghai Zhiwang, and even some of the conservative faction, did not want him to do this.

There was no reason or basis for this desire. Perhaps it was because the stories over the past years had long since proved that he would not do such a thing.

Chapter 1056 – A Devil's Decision

Everyone waited expectantly for Chen Changsheng to give a perfect resolution, even the staunchest bishop of the conservative faction.

The elderly bishops gazed at Chen Changsheng with rather complex gazes.

He was Shang Xingzhou's student, a young man raised up by Mei Lisha, an unquestionable member of the Xining lineage, a successor of the Orthodoxy's traditional line. Logically speaking, he should have been standing on their side, but he was not.

He had placed Linghai Zhiwang and Daoist Siyuan in important roles, and after Daoist Baishi died in Wenshui City, he had not comforted the conservative faction. Instead, he had allowed Hu Thirty-Two, a bishop of the new faction with a terrible reputation, to replace Daoist Baishi.

It was precisely these matters that caused intense dissatisfaction in the conservative faction, resulting in today's situation.

But even now, no one even thought or even dared to think about driving the Pope off his throne.

They still held hope for Chen Changsheng.

But they themselves did not know what they hoped Chen Changsheng would do.

Mei Chuan's body was still in the darkness outside the hall.

This was Xu Yourong's choice.

Chen Changsheng could go with the flow, but he would not do this.

Because the Dao he cultivated ever since he was a child meant that he could never deceive himself and others.

Although this might have been one of the necessary

characteristics needed to become one who could succeed in great undertakings.

He suddenly recalled Bie Yanghong's words in White Emperor City.

There was naturally a massive difference between them, but it could still serve as an analogy.

He then recalled Archbishop Mei Lisha's final words to him before his death.

"When I was walking along the Divine Avenue, I recalled that matter from many years ago, before that year's Grand Examination."

A nostalgic smile appeared on Chen Changsheng's face.

Everyone knew that he was referring to how Archbishop Mei Lisha had announced to the entire continent that Chen Changsheng wanted to attain first rank of the first banner in the Grand Examination.

This reminiscence did not continue. The atmosphere that could have warmed became tense once more.

A cold and biting voice cut through the crowd.

"And then Your Holiness killed his only nephew!"

The great hall became abnormally silent.

Chen Changsheng said nothing.

Yes, someone had made Mei Chuan the Education Overseer of the Orthodox Academy precisely to make difficulties for him.

Whether he killed him or didn't kill him, it would result in difficulty.

So Tang Thirty-Six had not hesitated. He had gone off to the house to bring back a sword and kill Mei Chuan.

So Xu Yourong had killed Mei Chuan.

They were the two closest to him, who most understood his mind and heart, so they would not let him choose, would not let him carry that infamy.

But he had not stopped Tang Thirty-Six back then, so this was also his choice.

Above the sea of stars belonged to the Divine Kingdom.

Below the filth belonged to the dust.

"I will bear all the crimes that I should bear."

Chen Changsheng calmly said to the crowd.

He did not use warm memories to close the fissure between the new and conservative, did not give a sufficiently convincing reason.

There was no explanation, so there was naturally no resolution.

He chose to calmly bear it.

The Great Hall of Light was filled with cries of shock.

The expressions of the priests continuously shifted, revealing all kinds of emotions.

Some people were disappointed, others relieved. Some were suspicious, others perplexed.

Chen Changsheng was willing to bear all crimes.

The problem was, who beneath the starry skies was willing to convict the Pope of any crimes?

This was not a Saint's self-criticism, but a most callous declaration.

Several despairing sighs could be heard in the crowd, as well as several criticisms.

Chen Changsheng gripped the Divine Staff and quietly stood, saying nothing more.

Linghai Zhiwang walked in front of the platform and took out a long-prepared scroll. He unfurled it with both hands and began to read from it.

As his frigidly cold voice announced name after name, the clamor in the hall gradually died down.

The only sounds left were the increasingly heavy breathing and the increasing number of footsteps.

Those pale-faced and hateful black-clothed enforcers of the Hall of Heavenly Judgment took ten-some bishops out of the crowd.

One of the cardinals responsible for managing the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education had been removed from his position.

Linghai Zhiwang's voice remained devoid of emotion, as clear as the sharpest knife.

He read the crimes of this cardinal.

These crimes had nothing to do with tonight's events, but the accusations were clear, the evidence irrefutable.

The cardinal did not resist. He calmly followed those black enforcers out of the hall.

The expressions of Zhuang Zhihuan and the other cardinals flickered as they gazed at his somewhat desolate figure.

The air in the hall became more and more oppressive. Finally, a hole was torn in it.

A bishop that had already been dragged past the doors of the hall struggled to turn around and shouted at the platform, "Does Your Holiness intend to be a cruel sovereign!"

The crowd recognized from his voice that this bishop was the first to criticize Chen Changsheng.

Chen Changsheng did not answer. His hand on the Divine Staff, he quietly stood on the platform.

Zhuang Zhihuan finally walked out of the crowd. After calmly bowing, he asked, "Will the final decision be postponed until the Archbishop emerges from seclusion?"

Countless eyes fell upon him.

Everyone understood what he meant.

The Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education was under the direct administration of Mao Qiuyu.

Mao Qiuyu was about to become the Orthodoxy's only Divine Domain expert.

Zhuang Zhihuan's question was a warning, perhaps even a threat.

Linghai Zhiwang gave him an impassive glance, saying nothing, but an unconcealed killing intent appeared in his cold eyes.

Zhuang Zhihuan remained unmoved. He only stared at Chen Changsheng.

At this moment, an unexpected person spoke.

Archbishop An Lin said with a solemn expression, "The Saint traverses the sea of stars as if before an abyss..."

"From the final section of the general commentary on the Essay on the Origin of the Dao."

Chen Changsheng did not let her finish.

He turned to her and said, "This part of the scripture speaks of respect."

Archbishop An Lin bowed and replied, "Yes."

Chen Changsheng said to her, "In this aspect, I am better than you."

An Lin appeared slightly dazed, then she turned to look at those several figures in the darkness outside the hall.

Tonight, Mei Chuan's corpse had been transported into the Li

Palace through the aid of those people.

Just what should be respected? The sea of stars? The Great Dao? Or perhaps the lives of one's relatives or subordinates?

She was quiet for a very long time, then sighed, "How did Your Holiness know?"

Chen Changsheng did not answer.

Earlier, behind the stone hall, when An Hua was tidying his robes, she had told him in a trembling voice.

Archbishop An Lin ceased her question. With a somewhat bitter voice, she asked, "How does Your Holiness plan to handle me?"

Chen Changsheng answered, "I said before, I am willing to bear all crimes."

An Lin sighed, "I understand. I will yield my post as Sacred Hall Archbishop."

She had not betrayed the Pope's intentions.

Today was the first time she had been persuaded by the conservative faction to help them with a few things.

Because she wanted to see how the Pope would handle this matter.

The result she saw now made her somewhat sorrowful, somewhat disappointed.

It was not because the exposure of her crime had led to her losing her position as Prefect. It was because Chen Changsheng had been too firm and callous in handling this matter.

She softly said, "Is this the heartlessness of a Saint?"

"No. Some people want me to be a ruthless tyrant. Some people want me to be a hero. Some want me to be a sage and others want me to be a Saint."

Chen Changsheng paused for a moment, then continued, "But in

truth, I am still that young Daoist entering the capital to take the Grand Examination."

An Lin earnestly asked, "This being the case, why go through such pains?"

Chen Changsheng's brow creased and his breathing became coarser.

Only the people closest to him would be able to tell that he was in an extremely poor mood.

"Did none of you ever think of a certain problem? It was never me that wanted to be Pope.

"I don't know who made this wicked decision. Perhaps it was Martial Uncle, or maybe it was Archbishop Mei, or perhaps it was Master?

"It was them that wanted me to be Pope. Before making this decision, they did not ask me if I was willing.

"So doing these things is what they hoped for me to do."

He paused for a while, then continued, "But I had no desire to do these things.

"If the Pope must do these things, then I might not be suitable for the position of Pope."

He looked at the bishops of the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education and said, "If all of you still have any objections, then let it end here."

The Great Hall of Light was absolutely silent.

Some priests had not understood the meaning of Chen Changsheng's words

Some priests thought that they had understood but did not dare to believe it.

Linghai Zhiwang froze, Daoist Siyuan opened his eyes wide, and

Hu Thirty-Two fell into pensive thought.

An Lin was somewhat confused, thinking to herself, did I end up doing something wrong?

Chapter 1057 – His Holiness in the Sea of Light

The lanterns of the Orange Garden gave off a warmer light than the lanterns elsewhere in the capital. Perhaps it was because all the lanterns were covered in orange peels.

Xu Yourong stood in front of the window, her hands held behind her as she examined the orange lanterns in the garden. It was hard to tell what she was thinking.

Upon seeing her back, Mo Yu suddenly thought of the Divine Empress.

In those years, the Divine Empress loved to stand on the Dew Platform and look down upon the capital. Similarly, she also liked to hold her hands behind her back.

Mo Yu felt a deep unease in her heart.

Would another Divine Empress appear in the world?

She asked, "Why did you want to meet Prince Chen Liu? What were you planning?"

Xu Yourong did not turn around as she answered, "Just chatting about the old days."

In a chilly voice, Mo Yu asked, "You needed to go the Orthodox Academy just to chat about the old days? Then why did you kill Mei Chuan?"

"Given Tang Thirty-Six's way of doing things, do you think he would have let Mei Chuan live?"

Xu Yourong said, "I am not a person of the Orthodox Academy, nor of the Li Palace, so it's better for me to do the deed."

Mo Yu replied, "Your actions could be understood as you wanting to resolve some troubles for him for the sake of the deep affection

you have for him, and it could also be understood as you wanting to agitate the conflict between the new and conservative factions of the Orthodoxy, leaving no space for him and the venerable Daoist to make peace. The problem is, just what are you thinking?"

Xu Yourong turned to her and calmly noted, "You said to Chen Changsheng that you were worried that I would take revenge for the Empress."

Mo Yu replied, "I don't believe that you would forget, even though you denied this to him."

Xu Yourong smiled. "This being the case, shouldn't I be doing things this way?"

Annoyed, Mo Yu replied, "But you should also understand that this way will give Chen Changsheng a lot of trouble. The Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education has no right to demand an explanation from you, but they can ask Chen Changsheng for an explanation."

Xu Yourong replied, "This is very easy to resolve."

"Yes, just the word 'disrespect' is enough, because the only people present were you and Prince Chen Liu."

Mo Yu sneered at her, "But you understand Chen Changsheng. You know that his personality won't let him do this, so what will happen? In the end, he will be forced to become that person that he doesn't want to become the most."

Xu Yourong replied, "He should learn how to do this, at least if he wants to become Pope."

Mo Yu asked, "And if he simply doesn't want to be Pope?"

Xu Yourong was quiet for a while, then replied, "Then I'll just be Holy Maiden."

.....

.....

The events in the Li Palace were quickly spread to every part of

the capital.

The Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education had been purged. Many people had expected this, but they were still surprised that it had happened so quickly.

Even more surprising was what happened after that: Archbishop An Lin had fallen from grace.

The killing of Daoist Baishi in Wenshui City had shocked many people speechless, but both the Imperial Court and the Li Palace had remained silent on the matter at the time for their own particular reasons. But tonight's events had been personally witnessed by many people.

The first thunderclap that everyone believed Chen Changsheng would bring down over the capital upon his return had nonetheless not only shocked the people, but also made them rather emotional.

He had lived up to his name as the appointed successor of the previous Pope and lived up to his name as the venerable Daoist's student. In the face of Chen Changsheng's purge, neither the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education nor Archbishop An Lin had put up any resistance. No one knew how many unimaginable stratagems were hidden beneath the calm exterior of the situation.

Just when everyone felt like the curtain would fall on tonight's drama, another crack of thunder exploded over the capital.

It was Chen Changsheng's final words.

'Let it end here'? What did this mean?

Did it mean that the purge of the Orthodoxy's conservative faction would stop here?

Did it mean that Shang Xingzhou and the Imperial Court's probing of the Li Palace must end here?

Or was it referring to... the position of Pope?

.....

.....

Rumors spread like the wind, and with the aid of several thunderclaps, the clouds over the capital were quickly scattered.

As the multitudes of stars calmly looked down on the world, a multitude of stars also appeared within the human world.

Several thousand of the Orthodoxy's most pious believers walked out of their homes and came to the front of the Li Palace, where they kneeled on the icy ground.

The light of the candles in their hands seemed feeble, but when the thousands were gathered together, they became extremely bright.

An Hua kneeled at the very front, her face paler than her white robes and marked by faint tear stains.

As the believers increased, so did the light of the candles, until they finally manifested a sea of light.

There was no begging or pleas for mercy, but the atmosphere was so downcast that one could occasionally hear weeping.

.....

.....

.....

.....

After Bishop Mei Chuan died in the Orthodox Academy, the capital began to talk.

None of this talk spoke well of Chen Changsheng.

Tonight, as the thunderclaps and sea of light shook the entire capital, public opinion rapidly changed.

The common people had clean forgotten the dinnertime discussions. They angrily looked toward the Bureau of Ecclesiastic

Education and its screen of maple trees, the princely estates of the Road of Peace, and even the Imperial Palace.

These flames of rage that had still not broken out caused the important personages living in these places to feel extremely wary and furious.

They urgently needed to know just what had happened in the Li Palace, wanting to get ahold of every possible detail.

The informants in the Li Palace and the Star Condensation painters of the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets, now working for the Imperial Court, played an extremely important role here.

In the great hall full of Sacred Light, Chen Changsheng stood at the highest point, speaking those words, the meaning crystal-clear.

.....

.....

"Flipping over the table and saying you're not going to do it anymore... just who does that threaten?"

Scorn appeared on Tianhai Chenwu's face. "Do you think that the masses can make the venerable Daoist yield?"

.....

.....

"Quite the shrewd move, retreating in order to advance."

The Prince of Xiang rubbed the fat of his belly, his face stricken with worry. "It's not like the Imperial Court can just tear the entire thing down, right?"

.....

.....

Different people had different understandings of Chen Changsheng's words.

To the common people, the Saint had become dispirited by the

dangerous situation.

To the important personages, this was nothing more than a means for him to resist the efforts of Shang Xingzhou and the conservative faction.

And whether they expressed derision or distress, these powerful figures truthfully felt this to be quite the formidable move.

Only Xu Yourong and Tang Thirty-Six knew that this was not some strategy.

Because when Chen Changsheng said those words, he had truly meant them.

.....

.....

Xu Yourong said, "These matters go against your heart and conflict with your Dao. It truly is rather difficult."

Chen Changsheng said, "I myself was not willing to do these things, so how could I stand and watch as the two of you did them for me?"

Xu Yourong calmly said, "Perhaps we're just people that like to do these things?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "No one is born with a love of killing people, or vying for power, or scheming and treachery."

Xu Yourong indifferently said, "When I was born, I didn't like playing mahjong, but that was because I didn't know how to."

There was silence between the two, then Chen Changsheng said, "Are you disappointed in me?"

"Of course not, because only someone who doesn't want to be Pope can be a good Pope."

Xu Yourong added, "Just like how your senior brother doesn't want to be Emperor, which is why he's a good Emperor."

Tang Thirty-Six's exasperated voice could be heard outside the hall.

"I'll go first," she said to Chen Changsheng.

Chen Changsheng said, "Senior is a person that's very easy to get close to."

Xu Yourong returned, "But I am not."

Chen Changsheng was at a loss.

Xu Yourong turned and left the Li Palace.

A few moments later, she was in front of the Imperial City.

She wanted to go and see the emperor.

Chapter 1058 – The Young Emperor

Tang Thirty-Six entered the hall, ran over to Chen Changsheng, and practically shouted, "What was the meaning of those words?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "The literal meaning."

Tang Thirty-Six gave him a blank stare, then asked, "Why?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "I suddenly think that his view might have been correct."

Tang Thirty-Six vigorously waved his hand. "In the past, didn't we talk about this by the lake? To be young is to be correct!"

Chen Changsheng sincerely replied, "This statement in itself is not correct."

Tang Thirty-Six angrily shot back, "Does that mean that your statement is correct?"

Chen Changsheng paused a bit before answering, "I was a little angry at the time."

Tang Thirty-Six asked, "So you were just venting your anger?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "You can say that."

Tang Thirty-Six reasoned, "Since you were just venting your anger, it naturally can be treated as invalid."

Chen Changsheng earnestly requested instruction. "Why is that?"

Tang Thirty-Six explained, "You and I are humans, and when humans vent, they fart. Venting your anger is just farting nonsense, and how can you treat nonsense as true?"

Chen Changsheng argued, "Fart has a smell, but just venting air won't necessarily have an odor."

Tang Thirty-Six replied, "Whether or not it has a smell, it definitely won't have that nasty elderly smell that you can find on their bodies."

Chen Changsheng recalled that Su Li had once said something similar.

"We have to think of a way to get those believers outside the Li Palace to stand up."

He stopped thinking about those other problems, asking Tang Thirty-Six, "Do you have any good ideas?"

Tang Thirty-Six sharply said, "You were the one to tie the bell, so why do I have to think about the solution?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "I'm not skilled at these things."

Tang Thirty-Six took stock of the surroundings and asked, "Where's Xu Yourong?"

Chen Changsheng explained, "She went to the Imperial Palace."

Tang Thirty-Six's expression subtly shifted.

"What's wrong?" Chen Changsheng asked.

"She just got back to the capital yesterday, but today she went to see Prince Chen Liu, and then she went to see Mo Yu, and now she's going to see His Majesty."

Tang Thirty-Six wondered, "Why is she seeing so many people? Don't you find it strange?"

.....

.....

The Emperor of the Great Zhou was very young and also very inconspicuous. His presence was so low-key that he was often forgotten by the common people.

Even now, his existence was a great mystery to the subjects of the Great Zhou. Few even knew that his name was Chen Yuren.

By this point, Shang Xingzhou was rarely offering his opinion on important matters of state. He was not even present in the capital most of time, spending most of it in Luoyang's Monastery of

Eternal Spring. Anyone could tell that he was preparing to hand over the reins of government. Of course, this was founded on his resolving the question of the Orthodoxy, but until that day came, he would remain the most powerful person in the Great Zhou.

As for the important matters of the court, they were being monopolized by powerful nobles like the Chen princes and the Tianhai clan.

The only task the young emperor had was to read the memorials sent into the palace from the various provincial and county governments.

He also rarely met with the great ministers in the palace. Even Mo Yu, who he had personally summoned back to the capital, had only entered the palace three times.

Many people believed that this was because the emperor's cold and eccentric personality made him unwilling to meet others.

And why was this the case? Because he was physically disabled.

He could not speak, could only see out of one eye, was missing an ear, was lame in one leg, and only had one hand.

Such heavy disabilities meant that even the term 'cripple' was not too excessive.

But this cripple had become the Emperor of the Great Zhou.

Shang Xingzhou's presence meant no one dared to say anything, much less express any objections, but their views could not be altered.

Ever since Yuren ascended to the throne, all sorts of rumor and gossip had circulated within and without the palace.

Some said that he had a cruel and ruthless personality that delighted in beating maids to death.

Other said that he was timid and introverted, bossed around every day by the palace maids.

But these people had all forgotten a very important thing.

The young emperor only read through memorials and resided deep in the palace.

But he had needed only three years after his ascension to stabilize the chaos that followed the fall of the Tianhai government.

The policies of the Imperial Court proceeded smoothly and the government grew more transparent by the day. The severe laws were done away with while justice remained untiring. The lives of the people were gradually improving.

The current Great Zhou could truly be described as a world in peace.

How could such an emperor be a cruel and incapable sovereign, and how could he be a timid and mediocre individual?

Many important individuals, the White Emperor included, were well aware that this emperor was extraordinarily wise and skilled in governance.

Yes, how could Emperor Xian and the Tianhai Divine Empress's only son, the one entrusted with Shang Xingzhou's lifelong ideals, possibly be an ordinary person?

.....

.....

Xu Yourong naturally did not believe that the young emperor was as the rumors described.

She was also curious to see what sort of person he was.

Even before the young emperor returned to the capital to take the throne, she had already heard his name many times.

In those conversations, the young emperor was called 'Senior' or 'Senior Yuren'.

In the Garden of Zhou's snowy temple and mausoleum, Chen

Changsheng had mentioned his senior brother many times.

At the time, Chen Changsheng still did not know she was Xu Yourong, so he naturally hid nothing from her.

In those conversations she heard absolute intimacy and trust.

Even though it had been many years since he had left Xining Village and three years since he had left the capital, Chen Changsheng's trust in his senior brother had remained unchanged.

Even though these martial brothers had not met once since that night in the Mausoleum of Books.

The question was, could people really not change?

Xu Yourong did not think so, especially since she was well aware of the power of that chair.

It was precisely the chair that Yuren was sitting on now.

For this chair, even a person like Emperor Taizong would become cruel and heartless, killing his brothers and tyrannizing his father.

The Divine Empress was the same.

The young emperor was a descendant of the Chen clan, the Divine Empress's own son. How could he be a person who believed in emotions?

Xu Yourong was somewhat uneasy.

Many of the things she wanted to do were founded on Chen Changsheng's trust toward Yuren.

So she wanted to personally see what sort of person the young emperor was.

Eunuchs and maids escorted her to the door of the hall, then bowed and retreated.

Xu Yourong noticed that these eunuchs and maids gazed at the light within the hall with respect and adoration.

Ever since she was little, she would often enter the Imperial

Palace, and there was still a palace here that belonged to her. She was extremely familiar with this place, but extremely unfamiliar with such gazes.

Such gazes did not belong to a place as deep and dark as the Imperial Palace.

The light from deep within the hall came from a Night Pearl embedded into a cinnabar pillar.

The ancient floorboards had been wiped so clean that one could see their own reflection in them.

The young emperor sat behind a desk, reading a memorial.

He was dressed in bright yellow, with one of the sleeves hanging empty.

His hair was immaculately combed, not intentionally draped so as to conceal the blind eye.

Xu Yourong walked up to the desk.

The young emperor raised his head.

He had a very warm expression and calm eyes, but he gave off an aura of clear persistence.

Xu Yourong found him rather familiar, and then she felt an inexplicable sense of intimacy.

Because he was the Empress's son? Or was it because his eyes and expression seemed to have been carved from the same mold as Chen Changsheng?

Xu Yourong had a deep understanding of the Tianhai Divine Empress, and a deep understanding of Chen Changsheng.

Without even speaking, she knew what the Divine Empress and Chen Changsheng would be thinking.

At this moment, she also knew what the young emperor was thinking.

Xu Yourong asked, "Why does Your Majesty not like me?"

Chapter 1059 – Sugared Plums

With just a glance, Xu Yourong could tell that Yuren did not like her.

Yuren calmly gazed at her. He said nothing, because he could not speak.

Xu Yourong mocked herself, "I always believed that everyone liked me."

It was a rather cute phrase.

Yuren smiled.

But the laughter in his eyes was rather faint, or perhaps indifferent.

Xu Yourong looked into his eyes and suddenly smiled.

Because she understood why Yuren did not like her.

Tonight's events had probably already been sent into the palace. Yuren probably knew that Chen Changsheng had truly gotten angry.

In his view, these matters had been instigated by Xu Yourong.

So he did not like her.

Upon understanding this, Xu Yourong realized that she did not need to ask any further questions.

Yuren truly did regard Chen Changsheng with great importance, just like Chen Changsheng did for him.

These martial brothers from Xining Village were just like brothers by blood, perhaps even closer.

Xu Yourong's smile was very beautiful, because she had always been very beautiful.

And this was a sincere smile.

Whether it was the effect of her beautiful face or her sincere smile, the indifference in Yuren's eyes somewhat decreased.

"Yes, he doesn't like being Pope, and he did not have the ability to choose in this matter."

Xu Yourong went on, "I was different. When I was five, the Empress and Master gave me a chance to choose. This was a choice that I made, and it has already become my habit, so it is more suitable for me to do what comes next."

What would happen next?

Firstly, it was naturally a continuation of this conversation.

Xu Yourong very casually took a seat across from Yuren.

Yuren used his right hand to push over a small plate.

Xu Yourong realized that the plate contained sugared plums.

Yuren in no way seemed like a person who liked eating sugared plums, so perhaps these were meant for the eunuchs and maids?

Xu Yourong did not think this was a disgrace. On the contrary, she knew that this was an expression of Yuren's kindness.

Though the method he used to express his kindness was, just like Chen Changsheng's, rather awkward.

She used her fingers to pick up one of the sugared plums and pop it into her mouth, and a satisfied expression appeared on her face.

Yuren smiled, also very satisfied.

Xu Yourong said, "I do not cultivate the Dao of the Orthodoxy's legitimate line. Up until today, I also do not quite understand what Chen Changsheng means by following his heart. As a result, I can't understand the relationship between you disciples and your master. Across the entire continent, it's probably only you three that understand it, but the problem must still be resolved."

Yuren calmly gazed at her, using his eyes to inquire as to how she

planned to resolve it.

"It's very simple. You martial brothers will work together and invite your master to retire."

Seeing as her mouth held a sugared plum, Xu Yourong's voice was rather garbled.

But the meaning she wanted to convey was clear, as sharp as the edge of the temple sword.

A gasp could be heard from the shadows of the hall, like someone had eaten an extremely sour plum.

Xu Yourong's expression did not change. It was evident that she already knew someone was there.

Yuren shook his head at the shadow.

Eunuch Lin gradually walked out from the shadow, then bowed and retreated out of the hall.

Perhaps it was because the impact of Xu Yourong's suggestion was too great or perhaps it was just his age, but this expert of the Imperial Palace appeared rather stooped as he departed, and when he left, he even forgot to bar the door. A chilly winter breeze blew in out of the heavy darkness, and when it was blocked by the array installed in the hall, it made a flapping sound as if it was blowing against paper.

A window on the western wall was blown up, its cover clacking against the wall. Several wisps of breeze penetrated the array and ruffled the yellow silk in the hall. The Night Pearl was not a candle, but its light seemed to be affected by the breeze, constantly swaying so that it could not properly illuminate the faces of Xu Yourong and Yuren.

Their faces were devoid of expression and their eyes did not blink. They quietly stared at each other.

Xu Yourong's eyes were absolutely calm.

Yuren was somewhat puzzled.

He could not understand why she had given this suggestion, or how she would even dare to make such a suggestion.

The entire continent knew that, in utter contrast to the callous and emotionless way he treated Chen Changsheng, Shang Xingzhou treated Yuren extremely well.

So well that there was nothing to criticize.

Even Shang Xingzhou's foes, even Chen Changsheng, had to admit to this point.

"Yes, he raised you and taught you, cherished you and protected you. He made you emperor and taught you how to rule, and now he even intends to hand over the government to you. In every aspect, he seems to treat you very well, but the problem is, is he really treating you well?"

Xu Yourong calmly said, "He loves Emperor Taizong, not you. You are just a projection of his feelings, or perhaps a puppet."

The wind stirred once more.

The bright yellow sleeve drifted in the wind.

Yuren raised his brows.

He did not leave with a sweep of his sleeve, did not slap the desk and rise.

But Xu Yourong knew that he did not want to listen.

So she approached the problem from a different direction.

"If those two really do break into hostilities, can you really just watch them kill each other? If your master really does want to kill Chen Changsheng, will you not feel regret in the future? Even considering how well your master treated you, you should at least attempt to stop this from happening."

Xu Yourong said, "You should choose where you stand, the

sooner, the better, and you cannot choose the middle."

Yuren shook his head.

He did not believe Xu Yourong was wrong, nor was he rejecting her proposal. He was telling her that doing this had no meaning.

Xu Yourong's gaze fell on the jade pendant tied to his waist and she understood.

Three years ago, when the capital was shrouded in snow, Chen Changsheng went to kill Zhou Tong, and Shang Xingzhou prepared to leave the palace. At the time, Yuren stood in the snow, the jade pendant in his hand.

This jade pendant had been gifted by the Qiushan clan and symbolized how Qiushan Jun had stabbed himself in the chest during Mount Li's internal strife.

Yuren had used the jade pendant to express his own resolve and stop Shang Xingzhou from leaving the palace.

But at the time, Shang Xingzhou had said to him that this was the last time.

Yuren understood his master. Since he had said that this was the last time, it really was the last time.

He did not believe that if he worked together with his junior brother, they would be able to force their master to yield.

Xu Yourong suddenly asked, "You and Chen Changsheng have never met after the coup of the Mausoleum of Books. Even though you are both in the capital, perhaps only one wall away. Why is this?"

Yuren looked out the window to the west, a hint of yearning on his face.

The Orthodox Academy was over there.

Xu Yourong continued, "Because the two of you know that your master does not want you to meet."

Yuren gave no response.

Both he and Chen Changsheng knew what their master was most wary of.

So he and Chen Changsheng had never thought about meeting.

Even though they dearly wanted to.

Xu Yourong continued to ask, "But did either of you ever think about why he was not willing to see the two of you meet?"

Yuren was somewhat confused, thinking to himself, isn't it because of those reasons that the entire world knows of?

Xu Yourong gave a faint smile and said, "Because he is afraid of the two of you."

Chapter 1060 – An Ordinary and Trifling Matter

Why was Shang Xingzhou so afraid of Chen Changsheng and Yuren meeting?

If one worked backward, perhaps it was because what Shang Xingzhou most feared was his two students working together.

From this perspective, Xu Yourong's words might have exposed this world's most important secret.

The hall was very quiet.

A brush quietly rested on the edge of an inkstone like an oar of a boat docked at the shore.

Yuren used his hand to take up a soaked cotton towel. He clenched and unclenched the towel several times, an action which could be considered washing his hand.

He did not respond to Xu Yourong's proposition. Instead, he took up the brush.

The tip of the brush flitted over the sea of ink, stirring up a tiny black wave. Then it flew into the air, broke through the clouds, and left a clear stroke of ink on the snow-white paper.

After writing a line of words, Yuren put down the brush and used his fingers to turn the paper to face Xu Yourong.

"What sort of person was she?"

.....

.....

'She' here naturally referred to the Tianhai Divine Empress.

Since she had entered the Imperial Palace, Xu Yourong had not once brought up a topic related to the Divine Empress.

She could have made an issue of this relationship, saying something along the lines of 'Whether or not Your Majesty is willing to admit it, the Divine Empress was still your mother'.

She could have engaged with Yuren in a discussion on nature versus nurture.

Or she could have spoken in a sobbing tone about her own life in the Imperial Palace, using this as a natural springboard to talk about the many marks that the Divine Empress had left on this place.

But she did none of these, because she was not sure what Yuren's impressions of the Divine Empress were, what he felt about her.

Moreover, Yuren was Chen Changsheng's most respected senior. She did not want to use these overly cruel methods that stabbed straight to the heart.

When she saw the question on the paper, she confirmed that she was not wrong, and then she felt somewhat moved and relieved, her eyelashes trembling.

She quickly regained her composure and smiled at Yuren. "This is truly a question that I am the best at answering."

No one understood the Tianhai Divine Empress more than Xu Yourong.

The Princess of Ping was only her nominal daughter and Prince Chen Liu was just someone she entrusted her hopes to, used to comfort herself. As for Mo Yu and Zhou Tong, in the end, they were still only subordinates.

Only the Tianhai Divine Empress and Xu Yourong were truly master and disciple. In terms of thought and soul, they were a lineage, and in terms of affection, they were mother and daughter.

Now that the Tianhai Divine Empress's soul had returned to the sea of stars, only Xu Yourong truly understood her way of thinking and her goal.

She felt that she had the responsibility to have Yuren and this world understand what sort of person the Tianhai Divine Empress was.

"The Empress had the broadest of hearts. The sun and moon, the mountains and rivers, the great earth and the sea, and even the other side of the sea of stars—it could hold everything."

This was Xu Yourong's opening statement.

Yuren thought for a while, and then he used his palm to slowly turn the paper over.

With the turn of one's hand, one was a cloud, and when turning it the other way, one was the rain. He was speaking here of her methods.

Xu Yourong understood what he meant and replied, "An unordinary person naturally can't be judged according to ordinary matters."

Yuren turned once more and looked out the western window into the distance, at the Orthodox Academy in the darkness.

When the people are too afraid to speak and exchange feelings only through their eyes, where exist the virtuous? He referred here to her Dao and virtue.

Xu Yourong indifferently said, "Also an ordinary matter, and also a trifling one."

Yuren was somewhat surprised by this answer. Arching his brows, he lightly rapped his finger against the edge of the plate, making a crisp cling.

The plate contained sugared plums.

This action of Yuren's was rather vague. Another person would probably have found him difficult to understand.

But perhaps because she had interacted with Chen Changsheng for a long time, Xu Yourong quickly understood what he was

asking.

'If there was no Chen Changsheng, would you have become this sort of person?'

"Perhaps I would have become this sort of person. After all, the Empress did raise me."

Xu Yourong thought some more, then added, "But nobody can know the true answer, because... he already appeared."

A faint smile was on her face as she said this. She seemed very calm, but she was actually concealing a hint of shyness, especially when she said the last part.

Yuren faintly smiled, somewhat relieved.

.....

.....

Today was the day after the Orthodoxy's diplomatic mission returned to the capital.

In one day, Xu Yourong had met many important figures, and late in the night, she had gone to the Imperial Palace and met with the young emperor.

When this nighttime conversation was slowly proceeding toward the main topic, the first person she had met during the daytime was already several hundred li away.

Eight Dragonhorses of the finest stock tiredly drooped their heads, the clear water and the soycakes placed before them completely unable to attract their interest. Beads of sweat the size of beans poured out of their glossy skin and dropped to the floor, where they were quickly frozen into dregs of ice by the cold wind blowing through the streets.

One had every right to believe that Luoyang should be a little warmer than the capital, but for some reason, Luoyang was unusually cold this year.

Prince Chen Liu gazed at the dark streets. In recalling the great battle of Daos that had taken place here three years ago, he began to feel rather strange.

After meeting with Xu Yourong in the Orthodox Academy, he left the capital and rode to Luoyang.

Only when he entered this most prosperous metropolis of the Great Zhou did he suddenly think that he might have come too quickly.

Prince Chen Liu ignored the hot towel offered by one of his attendants. He only quietly stared at the monastery before him.

This monastery was the famous Monastery of Eternal Spring.

A blue-clothed Daoist walked out. After thanking him for his troubles, the Daoist let him inside.

Prince Chen Liu drove away those thoughts and calmly walked forward.

At this point, Xu Yourong had already entered the Imperial Palace, and that person within the monastery presumably already knew.

To him, this was an excellent opportunity, or perhaps an excellent breakthrough point.

Upon arriving at a seemingly simple room deep within the Monastery of Eternal Spring, the blue-clothed Daoist silently retreated, leaving only Prince Chen Liu.

Prince Chen Liu took a deep breath to calm himself, then pushed open the door into the room.

Shang Xingzhou was in this room, organizing medical cases with an extremely focused expression on his face.

The most powerful expert of the Human race looked right now like the most ordinary but also most ardent doctor.

Prince Chen Liu walked up to the desk. By the light of the Night

Pearl, he could clearly see the names of the medicinal ingredients on the paper.

His eyes slightly focused as he thought, if I'm seeing things correctly and remembering correctly, these are the ingredients the Tang clan analyzed as being used to refine the Cinnabar Pill.

Does the Imperial Court plan to use this method to weaken Chen Changsheng's prestige?

Shang Xingzhou gave him no explanation. He quietly and attentively wrote out a medical case, apparently unaware that he had arrived.

Prince Chen Liu knew that not much time had been allotted to him, so he did not hesitate or pause, immediately saying what he wanted to say.

For him to travel several hundred li in one night, from the capital to Luoyang, had been precisely so he could say these words to Shang Xingzhou, even though it was nothing more than a few sentences.

"His Majesty is the Divine Empress's son."

Prince Chen Liu looked at Shang Xingzhou and added, "But I am a descendant of Emperor Taizong."

These words finally made Shang Xingzhou take his eyes off the desk and onto the prince's face.

Shang Xingzhou did not hide his admiration, although his admiration was mostly of Prince Chen Liu's stance.

"Xu Yourong has entered the palace, probably with the intention of allying with His Majesty."

Prince Chen Liu continued, "It is clear that she is going crazy."

This line, taken from the poem 贫交行 by Du Fu, refers to the impermanence of human relations, with people sometimes gathering together like clouds and other times as scattered as the

rain and that they are treacherous and scheming.

Chapter 1061 – Beyond the World and the Starry Sky

Shang Xingzhou said nothing. Rising, he walked out of the room.

Prince Chen Liu paused for a moment before hurriedly following.

Shang Xingzhou took the stone steps on the side of the room to walk to the roof, which appeared to serve as a star observation platform.

A chilly wind ruffled his sleeves.

It was only at this point that Prince Chen Liu noticed that this monastery did not have a temperature-controlling array installed.

Shang Xingzhou raised his head up to the starry sky. He did not put his hands behind his back, and his blue sleeves blown back by the wind made him seem like a clown on stage. It seemed like he was about to crouch down and then leap forward, perhaps wanting to leap up into the starry sky, but his final fate was to comedically fall back to the ground.

Prince Chen Liu gazed at his figure, subconsciously comparing him to the Divine Empress on the Dew Platform.

"If one wants someone to die, one must first make them go crazy."

Shang Xingzhou's voice was as light as the wind. It had no flavor or emphasis, making it impossible to tell what he was really feeling.

Prince Chen Liu did not understand who he was referring to. Was the crazy one Xu Yourong or the emperor? And who was the person about to die?

Shang Xingzhou's eyes gradually sank deeper into the sea of stars and he spoke no more.

Prince Chen Liu bid farewell. As he left the Monastery of Eternal Spring, he could not help but turn his head to look at that rooftop.

He was still not sure if he was correct in coming to Luoyang tonight.

His morning meeting with Xu Yourong in the Orthodox Academy and the words she had said seemed extremely deliberate.

That she had made him feel like they were deliberate had been a deliberate action on her part.

But if he had not always had these thoughts, how could he have been stimulated by these deliberate actions?

Over the last few years, he had hidden his ambition extremely well. No one knew of it, not even those who were familiar with him, like his father or Mo Yu. Even the Tianhai Divine Empress had only suspected but had never been sure. Of course, this might have been because she just didn't care.

But he could not hide it from Xu Yourong.

In the Imperial Palace, he had always felt like this girl was looking at him rather strangely, as if she was smirking at him.

She had not exposed him then, so why had she said those words now? Why had she so deliberately given him this chance?

Prince Chen Liu could not miss this chance, and he also knew that if his response was the least bit improper, he would be regarded by Shang Xingzhou as sowing discord. As a result, he had been very calm and candid. It now seemed that this sort of method was correct. At the very least, it had not incurred any response from Shang Xingzhou.

So what should he do next?

Prince Chen Liu traveled overnight to return to the capital. By the time he had reached the princely estates of the Road of Peace, the winter sun was high in the sky and warmth was beginning to

permeate the air.

It seemed that the winter truly was about to pass, that the season of renewal had arrived.

Prince Chen Liu was somewhat emotional as he walked into the estate.

"You should be well aware that the Holy Maiden want to use us to force His Majesty to stand on the Pope's side."

The Prince of Xiang stared into his eyes and asked, "This being the case, why did you still go to Luoyang?"

"Yourong has always been fair in her actions. Even her schemes have always been open and aboveboard."

Prince Chen Liu was already extremely calm. Even the icy eyes of his father could not affect his expression.

"A [wildfire](#) truly is frightening, but if we did not have this fire, we wouldn't even have a chance to rescue the grain from the flames."

The Prince of Xiang's eyes suddenly turned mad, glimmering with a fiery light, but his voice went cold. "But did this thought ever occur to you? Victory can only be obtained from the middle of chaos, but does she have the ability to disorder the venerable Daoist's heart?"

Prince Chen Liu replied, "I understand Yourong. Even if the venerable Daoist wins in the end, it will be a bitter victory."

There was a pause, then the Prince of Xiang asked, "Then when do you think this will begin?"

Prince Chen Liu replied, "From the moment she arranged to meet with me in the Orthodox Academy, the chess game had begun. Her visit to the palace last night was her lethal move!"

The Prince of Xiang perked his brows. "A lethal move?"

Prince Chen Liu said, "Yes. This move was a move to win the

world, and so the world must be used to respond to it."

The Prince of Xiang sighed, "So the storm was already here."

"Only after the storm passes can one see the rainbow."

Prince Chen Liu continued, "When I was little, the Empress taught me that rainbows came from the sun, and we are the descendants of the sun."

The Prince of Xiang understood what he meant. He stared into his son's eyes and said, "His Majesty's blood is equally pure."

Prince Chen Liu noted, "But he is still a cripple."

The wildfire burning in the Prince of Xiang's eyes was gradually extinguished, but just like his son, the ambitions that he had long concealed gradually began to emerge.

He asked, "When the time comes, will His Holiness agree?"

Prince Chen Liu said, "If Yourong loses, His Holiness will naturally not survive."

"The last question."

The Prince of Xiang asked, "You never said what would happen if the Holy Maiden wins."

Prince Chen Liu grinned and said, "Other than the complete extermination of the clan, what sort of price could match up to this chess game for the world?"

The Prince of Xiang was quiet for a very long time, and then he began to laugh. As he gave this self-mocking laughter, the ambition in his eyes gradually scattered and his expression turned mild, his round face becoming as pleasant and amiable as an old farmer or landlord.

He held his portly belly with his hands and ruefully said, "It seems like we'll have to quickly carry out the marriage between you and Ping."

.....

.....

The Li Palace in the early morning was extremely quiet.

The sound of dry bamboo brushes sweeping across the hard stone could be heard in the distance.

Chen Changsheng opened his eyes. He pensively looked up at the complicated and somewhat incomprehensible carvings on the ceiling.

He had woken up before five o'clock. This was extremely rare. He had not immediately gotten out of bed upon waking. This was even rarer.

Lazing in bed was a grand pleasure that many youths partook in, but to him, this was unquestionably an extremely irresponsible waste of time that would fill him with disgust.

The reason he did not get out of bed was that this was his first day staying in the Li Palace.

He was still somewhat a stranger to his surroundings, somewhat ill-adapted to them, and even a tiny bit afraid. He didn't know where he should go after getting out of bed to wash his face, how he would be served, or even where the clothes he had taken off last night had been put.

He also did not know what Xu Yourong had discussed with his senior brother last night.

It was only after the greater part of the skywell in the outer hall was illuminated by the winter sun that he finally decided to rise.

The first person he saw was An Hua.

The thousands of believers who had come to offer their petitions in candlelight had finally been persuaded to leave late in the night, but An Hua had not left.

She had already spent half the night in the hall. Her eyes were

rather red, though it was hard to say if it was from fatigue or from crying.

"With regards to your aunt, it seems like this was the only way."

Chen Changsheng took the Daoist clothes from her hand. Seeing her reddened eyes, he apologetically said, "I hope that you won't blame me."

An Hua quickly replied, "I cannot possibly blame Your Holiness."

Chen Changsheng could tell that she was not lying. Confused, he asked, "Then why are you sad?"

An Hua lowered her head and asked, "Is Your Holiness truly prepared to leave?"

In many of the dynasties preceding the Great Zhou, the Daoist faith had also been the Orthodoxy, and many Popes had appeared throughout history.

The Pope had no term limits. Until they returned to the sea of stars, they would always be the divine ruler of the entire Orthodoxy.

However, of the Popes throughout history, there truly were a few who, either because they did not want to be entangled by secular matters while they pursued the Great Dao or were dejected by certain matters, decided to end their terms early, choosing either to hide from the world or venture to the other shore of the sea of stars.

As a child, An Hua had studied in the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green, and as an adult, she was a teacher. She had devoted the entirety of her youth to the Orthodoxy and could even recite a few of the scriptures from back to front. She was naturally aware of these records. The more she thought about Chen Changsheng's words in the Great Hall of Light, the more she believed that Chen Changsheng might choose this path. She was very nervous and uneasy, and even Tang Thirty-Six's soothing words ceased to have

an effect on her. In one night, she had wept many times.

Chen Changsheng gazed up at that piece of sky cut out by the roofs.

He once more recalled that black night like the mouth of a well he had sensed that night from the other end of the sea of stars.

He would bear the responsibilities he had to bear.

But after doing these things, if there were even farther places to visit, he naturally had to go and take a look around.

Ambition, 野心, literally translates to 'wild heart' or 'unrestrained heart', and wildfire is 野火 which literally translates as 'wild fire'.

Chapter 1062 – Your Hair's Disorderly

'Responsibility' and 'farther places' were Chen Changsheng's thoughts, but they did not exist only in his mind.

As he thought about these things, he also voiced them.

An Hua did not particularly understand his meaning, but upon learning that he was not leaving, she became much happier.

At this moment, Tang Thirty-Six, rubbing his drowsy eyes, walked into the hall.

An Hua felt that something was wrong about his gaze. After hesitating for a while, she softly said, "Young Master Tang, this is not appropriate."

No one could just waltz into the Pope's palace, much less sleep there.

Some old-fashioned and strict priests might have even accused Tang Thirty-Six of disrespect.

Tang Thirty-Six shook his head and said, "Relax. With such a hard stone bed, I certainly won't be sleeping here anymore."

After the two washed up, they partook of a very simple meal.

Tang Thirty-Six looked at the plain porridge and appetizers, and naturally began to think about his meeting with Chen Changsheng all those years ago in the Plum Garden Inn. He then recalled the pitiful and tasteless foods Xuanyuan Po had made early on in the Orthodox Academy. He couldn't help but sigh as he put down his chopsticks.

Putting down one's chopsticks could be because the food was not good enough, and it could also be because one was not in a good enough mood, perhaps because one was worried about something.

He looked into Chen Changsheng's eyes and said, "You still have not answered my question from yesterday."

Chen Changsheng ignored him and continued to eat.

Tang Thirty-Six continued to stare.

After some time, Chen Changsheng finally finished his meal. He put down his bowl and chopsticks, took a wet towel from An Hua, and then washed his face and hands twice. He then took a sip of precious [rock tea](#) and spit it out into a shallow plate of copper.

Tang Thirty-Six clicked his tongue, giving off an indescribable derision.

Chen Changsheng commented, "Such a noise really shouldn't be coming out of your mouth."

Tang Thirty-Six had been born in a wealthy family and had lived a childhood so luxurious that a normal person would find it unimaginable. Even the Princess of Ping, who had grown up in the palace, was probably inferior in this aspect. Even if Chen Changsheng should be derided for the life he lived as Pope, it was not Tang Thirty-Six's place to speak.

"Why do I feel like you want to say that good words never come out of a scoundrel's mouth?"

Chen Changsheng earnestly replied, "You misunderstand."

Tang Thirty-Six felt rather helpless. He said, "Can we finally talk now?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "Yourong and Prince Chen Liu grew up in the palace together. Since she rarely returns to the capital, it's very normal for them to arrange to meet."

Tang Thirty-Six said, "I've warned you many times to be vigilant about Prince Chen Liu."

In the past, Prince Chen Liu had assisted Chen Changsheng and the Orthodox Academy in many ways, and at its earliest period, had shown a most precious kindness. Consequently, Chen Changsheng had a very good impression of this descendant of the

Imperial clan. Moreover, he had never been able to think of a reason that Prince Chen Liu would target him.

But it now seemed that there were ample reasons.

Because he had a chance of becoming Crown Prince of the Great Zhou Dynasty.

If Yuren died.

Chen Changsheng understood Tang Thirty-Six's wariness and unease.

But how could his master let something happen to his senior brother?

"You can probably think of Xu Yourong's goal last night in going to the Imperial Palace. As long as Shang Xingzhou begins to doubt, the situation will fall into disorder."

Tang Thirty-Six used the most straightforward of words to shatter the calm that Chen Changsheng feigned through silence.

Chen Changsheng looked out the window at the gloomy day and asked, "But why does she want to do this?"

Tang Thirty-Six said, "I trust that Mo Yu has already warned you."

Chen Changsheng recalled the words Mo Yu had said to him that night.

Was Yourong doing these things to take revenge for the Tianhai Divine Empress?

Even if the floodwaters washed over the world, the sky fell and the earth cracked, and the people were plunged into the abyss of misery?

"It's not like this. At least, it's not this simple."

Chen Changsheng drew back his gaze and said to Tang Thirty-Six, "She said to me that if she really planned to do something, she

would tell me."

After breakfast, Tang Thirty-Six returned to the Orthodox Academy. He needed to communicate with Wenshui as quickly as possible so as to make arrangements for if the capital suddenly fell into chaos.

Xu Yourong came to the Li Palace.

As he watched the beautiful woman arrive with the gradually brightening day, Chen Changsheng suddenly felt nervous.

"I spent the entire night talking with your senior. I'm a little tired."

Xu Yourong covered her lips and carefully yawned.

Chen Changsheng noticed the hint of undispellable fatigue on her face and felt a little heartache.

"Then you should quickly rest."

Xu Yourong smirked at him. "Is there nothing that you want to ask me?"

Chen Changsheng answered, "If you're willing to tell me, you'll naturally tell me."

Xu Yourong smiled and said, "So let's take a walk outside and see if it can energize my spirit."

.....

.....

Last night, Luoyang had been abnormally cold. The chilling tide traveled along the winds, traveling from east to west, and so this morning, the temperature in the capital rapidly dropped and snow began to fall once more.

Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong walked through the snow-shrouded Li Palace, with priests and deacons keeping a fair distance from them.

Their footprints were the only ones in the massive plaza, and the picture seemed rather cold and deserted.

Her hands held behind her, Xu Yourong casually strolled amongst the halls, avidly examining them.

In terms of temperament, she was like a retired minister who had gone back to their hometown and had suddenly had the idea to go to the market.

Chen Changsheng felt it rather amusing, and then he felt it rather cute, and then he remembered that the Tianhai Divine Empress also liked to walk around like this.

Xu Yourong stopped. She stretched out her hand and pushed a disorderly strand of his hair back behind his ear, and then she laughed.

Chen Changsheng had a slight obsession with cleanliness and always performed his tasks seriously. His head of black hair was always impeccably combed, so this sort of sight was a rare occurrence.

This could only mean that his mood today was also somewhat disorderly.

"Yesterday, I arranged to meet Prince Chen Liu in the Orthodox Academy because I wanted you to meet him with me, but you had something to do back then, so I met him alone."

Xu Yourong said, "I said to him that I was going into the palace tonight and I hoped that he could seize this opportunity."

Chen Changsheng had not expected that this topic would be brought up so suddenly. He subconsciously asked, "Opportunity?"

"To him and the Prince of Xiang, the rift between you and Shang Xingzhou is their only opportunity."

Xu Yourong continued, "But your and my strength alone is not enough to make the situation fall into chaos, so they will not act

recklessly."

Chen Changsheng noted, "Unless you can convince Senior to stand on our side."

Xu Yourong replied, "Yes, so he will definitely go to Luoyang and find Shang Xingzhou to speak of this matter, perhaps even help me complete this task and have your senior brother stand on our side. At the very least, he can convince Shang Xingzhou that your senior brother will stand on our side."

Chen Changsheng said, "If we fail, he and the Prince of Xiang will have their opportunity."

Xu Yourong agreed. "Correct, and this will also be our opportunity."

Chen Changsheng was quiet for a while, then said, "Many people will die like this."

"The Empress once said that only by seeking peace through war can peace exist."

Xu Yourong said, "What I seek is the method that will spill the least blood."

The sudden ringing of a bell from deep within the Li Palace interrupted her words.

Several Red Geese flew through snow and into the distance.

The priests and deacons who were deferentially watching the pair from a distance looked around. They seemed to hear something and broke into joyful expressions.

Rock tea is a particular kind of tea where the tea is grown on the mountainside, limiting the number of tea leaves that can be produced and making the product very costly.

Chapter 1063 – A Good Person

Linghai Zhiwang and Daoist Siyuan hurried over. Upon seeing Xu Yourong at Chen Changsheng's side, they paused, and then they revealed joyful expressions.

They were representatives of the Orthodoxy's new faction, and their relationship with the Tianhai Divine Empress naturally meant that they were very close to Xu Yourong. However, after they finished bowing, the joy on their faces quickly receded as they said to Chen Changsheng, "Principal Mao has left seclusion."

In the era of the previous Pope, at least three of the Storms complied with the Li Palace's orders, but now, not even one did. So when Mao Qiuyu showed hope of breaking through, it was an extremely important matter to the Li Palace, perhaps the most important matter.

That he left seclusion today meant that he had succeeded in breaking through and becoming an expert of the Divine Domain.

For the Orthodoxy, this was naturally one of the most wonderful matters in the world.

But Linghai Zhiwang and Daoist Siyuan had rather serious expressions.

In the last few years, Mao Qiuyu had taken great care of Chen Changsheng and the Orthodox Academy. After Chen Changsheng ascended to the throne of the Pope and left the capital, Mao Qiuyu became the executor of Chen Changsheng's will in the capital.

The problem was that Mao Qiuyu was still a member of the Orthodoxy's conservative faction, and now that he had crossed the threshold, he could no longer be regarded as he usually was.

During his seclusion, the new and conservative factions had engaged in conflict after conflict. It was just two days ago that Chen Changsheng had returned, and he had already conducted a

purge of the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education.

What would Mao Qiuyu do once he learned of these things?

.....

.....

The winter was about to pass, but the weather did not warm. On the contrary, it became colder.

The cutting winds of winter blew the heavy snow down from the sky and painted the ten-some palaces completely white.

Xu Yourong asked, "Can I meet him first?"

Linghai Zhiwang turned to Chen Changsheng.

He naturally knew of the relationship between the Pope and the Holy Maiden, but this matter was far too important.

Now that Mao Qiuyu had succeeded in breaking into the next realm, his status in the Orthodoxy would become completely different.

If he could not be persuaded by the Pope, his first day after breaking through into the Divine Domain would also have to be his last day.

Seeing Mao Qiuyu standing over there on the other side of the snowstorm, his gray hair scattered over his shoulders and his two sleeves swaying in the breeze, Chen Changsheng thought of their first meeting in that year's Ivy Festival.

At the time, Mao Qiuyu was the Principal of the Heavenly Dao Academy and also Luoluo's first teacher.

Chen Changsheng thought of many more things: Mao Qiuyu hugging Xun Mei's body outside the Mausoleum of Books as tears streamed down his face, Mao Qiuyu quietly sitting in the tea house during the All-School Martial Exhibition, and Mao Qiuyu appearing in a carriage outside that courtyard filled with crabapple trees when he went to kill Zhou Tong.

In these last few years, Mao Qiuyu had not said very much, had done far too much, but he had always been quietly standing behind Chen Changsheng and the Orthodox Academy.

Perhaps it was because of his relationship with his martial uncle the Pope, or perhaps it was because Archbishop Mei Lisha had requested this of him.

Regardless of the reason, Mao Qiuyu had treated him extremely well.

Chen Changsheng stretched out his hand and scattered away the snowflakes in front of him, also scattering those extraneous thoughts.

He turned to Xu Yourong and said, "You go then."

Daoist Siyuan appeared rather surprised, but he did not dare defy this order. The Orthodoxy experts and the array hidden in the storm all retreated.

.....

.....

The Daoist church within the snowstorm remained quiet for a very long time.

Finally, Xu Yourong walked out and smiled at Chen Changsheng.

Linghai Zhiwang and Daoist Siyuan simultaneously exhaled.

Xu Yourong left in the snow, probably with many other tasks that she needed to do.

Chen Changsheng walked into the church and stood together with Mao Qiuyu by the window, gazing at the Li Palace in the falling snow.

The Li Palace was also very quiet. There were barely any footprints in the snow and the figures of Linghai Zhiwang and Daoist Siyuan appeared very distinct.

"There's fewer and fewer people."

Mao Qiuyu had a very melancholy expression.

Chen Changsheng understood his meaning.

Of the original Six Prefects of the Orthodoxy, the first to leave was Mei Lisha, and then Mu Jiushi had had her Orthodoxy cultivation crippled by the previous Pope and been driven out of the Li Palace. Afterward, Daoist Baishi was executed in Wenshui, and last night, Archbishop An Lin was silently removed from her post.

Now, even if Mao Qiuyu and Hu Thirty-Two were added, they could not make up the number required to use the Li Palace's grand array.

And now, Mao Qiuyu was about to leave.

Chen Changsheng said, "Martial Uncle had me come here to do this task, and so there are some things that have to be done."

The task he referred to was wielding the Orthodoxy's Divine Staff as Pope.

By 'some things', he referred to those bygone events, like those departures.

"I heard about Your Holiness's words from last night."

Mao Qiuyu asked, "Your Holiness will bear all the crimes that Your Holiness should bear?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "Yes."

Mao Qiuyu turned to examine his profile and asked, "But who has the right to judge whether Your Holiness has committed a crime?"

Chen Changsheng pondered this for a long time, and then he gave an answer that surprised Mao Qiuyu.

"Why did none of you ever ask my master or Martial Uncle this question?"

He did not speak of the will of the people, nor of history, and certainly not the history of humanity. Instead, he had given another question.

Mao Qiuyu noticed the sincere look in his eyes and his determined expression, and then, he discovered that he could not answer this question.

Chen Changsheng had also never thought about getting an answer. He continued, "Perhaps it's because I'm younger? Tang Thirty-Six once said that to be young is to be correct. This statement isn't correct, because correctness has nothing to do with age, so being old also does not mean one is correct."

Mao Qiuyu replied, "By seeing and experiencing more, perhaps one can take fewer detours."

Chen Changsheng said, "Between two points, a straight line is the shortest. There will naturally be no detours."

He was speaking of his sword that had learned from Wang Po's blade.

"Drive is admittedly important, but ruling the world is like cooking a delicate fish. One cannot act lightly."

Mao Qiuyu solemnly said to him, "This was the previous Pope's Dao."

This was the greatest difference that set the previous Pope apart from the Tianhai Divine Empress and Shang Xingzhou.

He did not care about the conflict between the Orthodoxy's new and conservative factions, nor did he care about the conflict between the Chen Imperial clan and the Tianhai Divine Empress.

He only supported the methods that would lead to a peaceful world.

Twenty-some years ago, Shang Xingzhou had conspired to rebel and the world seemed about to fall into chaos, so he objected.

Twenty years later, the Tianhai Divine Empress remained unwilling to return the government to the Chen Imperial clan and the world seemed about to fall into chaos, so he objected.

Mao Qiuyu gazed at that figure walking away through the snow and said, "The Holy Maiden's actions will certainly throw the world into chaos. The previous Pope would assuredly have fully opposed her, but you have chosen to act as if you do not see it. I truly do not know which is right."

Just now, when Xu Yourong was persuading him, she had engaged in an extremely complicated calculation and then said one sentence.

"Since your two sleeves sway with the breeze, there is no harm in putting your hands in your sleeves and looking from the sidelines."

'Two Sleeves in the Breeze' was Mao Qiuyu's Daoist name.

"In truth, I've always believed that Martial Uncle's methods were not necessarily correct."

Chen Changsheng thought back to that night in the Mausoleum of Books. His martial uncle the Pope stood in the flooded, impoverished southern part of the city, fighting the Tianhai Divine Empress while still protecting the innocent commoners. He was touched by this and admired his martial uncle for this, but he also felt a more complex emotion.

His martial uncle the Pope was a good person.

But did a good person have to endure such suffering?

Mao Qiuyu knew what he was thinking and earnestly advised, "Your Holiness, we should still be good people."

"I have no need to be a good person, because I have always been a good person."

Chen Changsheng sincerely said, " But I hope that a good person can be rewarded with good."

Chapter 1064 – A Simple Mission

To grant favors without seeking reward, perhaps not even letting others know, and to be willing to bear all sins, even if it meant sinking into eternal calamity—this was a Saint.

Chen Changsheng was the Pope, and the Pope was naturally a Saint. The problem was, he did not want to be a Saint, only a good person.

But a good person had to be rewarded with good.

Chen Changsheng was insistent on this point because he had seen far too many counter-examples.

The Tianhai Divine Empress and Shang Xingzhou could be called ambitious people or schemers, but they certainly could not be described as good people.

His martial uncle the Pope was a good person, so his life was of greatest suffering. No matter how the battle ended, he was bound to die.

Bie Yanghong had also died and Wang Po had nearly died several times. As expected, it was hard for good people to live long lives.

It was no wonder that Su Li was not willing to be a good person.

Chen Changsheng said, "I personally witnessed Bie Yanghong die."

Mao Qiuyu felt somewhat sorrowful.

Chen Changsheng continued, "I want to be a good person that is rewarded with good, but it's hard for me to do this alone. I need someone to help me."

There were many people helping him, like Tang Thirty-Six, Su Moyu, Luoluo, and Xu Yourong.

Just a moment ago, in front of the same window, Xu Yourong had spoken with Mao Qiuyu for a very long time, convincing him

to not do something.

But in Chen Changsheng's view, this was not enough.

He looked at Mao Qiuyu and sincerely requested, "I need Sir's help."

Unlike Xu Yourong, his request was very simple, and the reasoning behind it very simple as well.

He requested Mao Qiuyu to help all the good people in the world in being rewarded with good.

As the world rose and fell, it was very difficult to determine whether one was guilty, so was it really so easy to determine whether one was good or bad?

Mao Qiuyu looked into his eyes and asked in a stern tone, "If I do not agree to Your Holiness's view, what will you do?"

"I don't know."

Chen Changsheng contemplated the question for a time, then awkwardly said, "I really don't know."

He was not simply repeating himself, nor was he stressing the point. He truly did not know what he would do if such a thing happened.

Mao Qiuyu quietly stared, then abruptly said, "Okay."

It was a very simple answer.

Chen Changsheng gazed blankly at him, then began to happily laugh.

Mao Qiuyu also laughed.

They had not met in several years, but the Pope was still that simple youth of yesteryear.

.....

.....

In the Mausoleum of Books, Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong had once met a Monolith Guardian called Ji Jin, resulting in a conversation.

He said that she was a good person, and she said that he was a good person.

This was not because they wanted to be polite. Rather, it was their honest assessment of each other.

But that was not the spiritual goal that Xu Yourong sought.

Good and evil, right and wrong, had nothing to do with the Great Dao.

If she had not met Chen Changsheng, perhaps she would have viewed this world more indifferently, looked down upon it.

Just like the Tianhai Divine Empress.

Of course, even after meeting Chen Changsheng, she did not believe herself to be a good person in the common sense of the phrase. For instance, in this current matter, Chen Changsheng had acted purely out of kindness, moved as he was by Xun Mei's story, while she still wanted to gain some benefits from it.

The trees of the Mausoleum of Books were covered in a shallow layer of frost, making them seem like a forest of white jade.

The black Reflecting Monolith was also stained with a few flakes of snow. This made it seem even more like a book of rubbings, and it had an aura that was moving in a different way from usual.

Xu Yourong took her eyes off the Reflecting Monolith and onto a person. She indifferently said, "Back then, I and Chen Changsheng promised you that we would let you leave the Mausoleum of Books. Now we are fulfilling our promise. What is your view?"

The shoulders of the Monolith Guardian called Ji Jin were covered in snow. It was evident that he had been waiting for a long time.

Ji Jin was very excited by Xu Yourong's words, but fear appeared in his eyes. "Is it really okay?"

The Mausoleum of Books was the holiest ground on the continent, so it naturally had the strictest of laws.

A cultivator was required to swear a blood oath that they would never leave the Mausoleum of Books for the rest of their lives in order to become a Monolith Guardian who had the special right to observe the monoliths at any time.

Across thousands of years, only Su Li had managed to forcefully extract two Monolith Guardians from the Mausoleum of Books. Besides them, no Monolith Guardian had left alive.

Xu Yourong calmly said, "I am the Holy Maiden and Chen Changsheng is the Pope. Our words are law."

Ji Jin uneasily asked, "But what of the Great Zhou Imperial Court?"

Xu Yourong answered, "Last night, the Emperor of the Great Zhou issued a decree."

Only at this moment was Ji Jin finally sure that he could leave.

His body trembled as he kneeled in the snow and kowtowed to Xu Yourong.

His self-sealing many years ago, his following years of imprisonment, and the remorse that gnawed at his Dao heart night and day were, in this moment, completely transformed into ecstasy.

But what followed was confusion and anxiety.

He had lived for so long in the Mausoleum of Books; could he really leave? Could he really just leave like this?

Xu Yourong did not give him too much time to get emotional. She said, "If the other Monolith Guardians wish to leave, they may do so as well."

Ji Jin came to his senses and said, "Many thanks for the kindness of the Holy Maiden and His Holiness the Pope. I will go now to inform them."

Xu Yourong took a letter out of her sleeve and gave it to him, saying, "Deliver this letter for me."

Ji Jin came from Scholartree Manor in the south. After leaving the Mausoleum of Books, he was naturally going to return there.

This letter was for that important figure of Scholartree Manor.

Xu Yourong left the Reflecting Monolith hut and came to that wide and straight path at the base of the mausoleum.

The Grand Examination had been halted for three years, so there were far fewer cultivators in the Mausoleum of Books now. It was a cold and cheerless place.

She went to Xun Mei's old home, where she realized that though nobody had lived here in the past few years, it had been kept very clean.

Those youths who cooked dried meat and those youths who ate the dried meat had not come back for quite some time.

With her hands held behind her back, she walked toward the south, taking in her surroundings.

Just like in the Li Palace, she really did seem like a retired minister taking a stroll around the marketplace of his hometown.

The holy ground of cultivators, the Mausoleum of Books, was just a place to stroll around and view the scenery to her.

She quickly reached that stone plaza covered in canals, the southern face of the Mausoleum of Books.

In a gust of wind, a black-clothed girl appeared at her side.

"You had me run around so many places, I thought you had made these arrangements long ago. It turns out that you forgot the most important person."

The little Black Dragon jeered at her, "If you're having that fellow send a letter, just when do you think it will arrive? You should let me take it."

Xu Yourong explained, "A personal letter and Ji Jin are both ways that I am expressing my sincerity."

The Black Dragon asked in confusion, "What are you planning to have Wang Po do?"

Xu Yourong did not answer the question. She only quietly gazed at the Divine Path before her.

The Divine Path of white stone was still there, appearing even more holy and pure in the snow.

The pavilion was no more, and that elderly Divine General who had sat beneath it for six centuries had died in Xuelao City.

At the very top of the Divine Path was a Heavenly Tome Monolith.

Chen Changsheng had told her that there was not a single word on this monolith.

The Empress had died there.

She was the Holy Maiden of the south. She had the right to walk to the very top of the Divine Path.

But she did not.

She wanted to rely on her own abilities to reach the top.

Just like Xun Mei, that person that Chen Changsheng, Gou Hanshi, and the rest could never forget.

Xun Mei had not been able to ascend to the summit because Han Qing had been standing guard.

If she wanted to walk up, who would stand up to block her path?

Chapter 1065 – A Fine Couple

Xu Yourong quietly stared at the Divine Path, stared for a very long time.

As the snowstorm intensified and slackened, nobody appeared.

The little Black Dragon had taken out a stewed beef knuckle from some place and was currently gnawing on it. In a muffled voice, she said, "If it's not the final moment, who would dare to kill you?"

Xu Yourong gave a faint smile, then turned and began to walk out of the Mausoleum of Books.

The Black Dragon thrust her hand into the snowstorm. The oil staining her hand was instantly frozen into powder by an extremely low temperature, then blown away by the wind, leaving her hand completely clean.

She looked at Xu Yourong's back and asked, "Just what do you want Wang Po to do?"

Xu Yourong still did not reply.

The little Black Dragon suddenly thought of a possibility, and her vertical pupils slightly constricted.

She chased after Xu Yourong and began to yell.

"You want him to intrude upon the Divine Path?"

"Shang Xingzhou will definitely come to personally stop him!"

"That will cause a huge problem!"

.....

.....

The news that Mao Qiuyu had broken into the Divine Domain was quickly made known to the entire continent, causing shocks to run through it.

In a very short time, the Li Palace requested an honorific title

from the emperor on his behalf.

According to the old customs, an estate would have to be arranged for him.

The Storms of the Eight Directions had all had their own estates. For example, Bie Yanghong and Wuqiong Bi had Xiling's Ten Thousand Years Pavilion while Guan Xingke had Starshatter Rock in the Southern Sea. Cao Yunping's estate was Mount Feiya, which the Tianhai Divine Empress had gifted to the Elder of Heavenly Secrets, though very few people knew that the price the Elder of Heavenly Secrets had paid was just a visit to the capital to take a look at Chen Changsheng.

The estate Mao Qiuyu chose was somewhat surprising, but it was also within reason.

He chose Mount Han.

Mount Han was in the northern reaches of the continent, very far from the capital but very close to the snowy plains that the demons ruled.

More importantly, it was where the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets had once resided.

The Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets now completely belonged to the Great Zhou Imperial Court, but the buildings around the Heaven Lake of Mount Han and the marks the Elder of Heavenly Secrets had left there were still present.

Mao Qiuyu had used this choice to make his stance known, and it was also the Li Palace's second display of force following the events at the Mount Song Army headquarters.

The Great Zhou Imperial Court had no reaction. They remained silent on the matter and gave no objection.

Shang Xingzhou was still in Luoyang's Monastery of Eternal Spring and the emperor was still residing deep within the palace, rarely leaving his hall and even more rarely meeting people.

Xu Yourong's visit that night to the Imperial Palace had stimulated countless conjectures and much unease, but it now seemed that the weather would be fine for now.

The people simultaneously exhaled, but they were also greatly confused. Countless gazes looked toward a certain peaceful courtyard in the capital, looked toward its orange lanterns.

The marriage between the Prince of Louyang and Mo Yu was about to take place. Chen Changsheng would be officiating, and Xu Yourong, as the bride's only friend, would naturally be attending.

.....

.....

This marriage that attracted the attention of countless people was not conducted in the princely estate, but in the Orange Garden.

Starting at dawn, the garden became extremely lively, with the congratulations of guests and their teasing voices never once stopping.

Compared to the front courtyard, the rear courtyard seemed much quieter.

Linghai Zhiwang and several dozen bishops stood in the surrounding snowy forest, cutting this place off from the front courtyard.

Chen Changsheng stood in a pavilion, listening to the noise. He shook his head and said, "I didn't think that they were going to live here after they married. I still thought that she would move to the Road of Peace."

Xu Yourong looked away from the winterplums and said, "She doesn't want to be neighbors with those princes, and besides, the Road of Peace left a bad impression on her."

This year, both the capital and Luoyang were very cold, but time

was still passing and the winter was reaching its end.

The winterplums outside the pavilion radiated a striking and glamorous red, but perhaps in another few days, one would no longer be able to see such a sight.

Chen Changsheng gazed at the winterplums and thought of the death by a thousand cuts that Mo Yu and Zhexiu had carried out on Zhou Tong on the Road of Peace. He couldn't help but sigh.

The snow on the winterplums rustled down as a wind blew through the rear courtyard.

Mo Yu came with the wind.

Her face was heavily adorned with makeup today, but it did not seem overdone. She was gorgeous, just as striking as the bloody winterplums.

Before Chen Changsheng had time to voice his congratulations, a wave of perfume assaulted him.

Mo Yu hugged him.

Frightened, Chen Changsheng tried to push her away, but when he saw that exhaustion that not even the thick makeup could hide, he found that he couldn't bear to.

Mo Yu scooted up to his neck and took a deep whiff. "It's so comfortable! Alas, I won't be able to smell it in the future."

Xu Yourong raised her brows and turned around.

Mo Yu taunted, "Your eyes don't see, but your heart still isn't clean. If you're really not angry, why did you turn around?"

Yourong is fine. Yourong isn't angry.

Xu Yourong looked at the winterplums before her and mentally said to herself.

Then she turned around and gave Mo Yu a sweet smile. "I have no idea what you're saying."

Mo Yu teased, "Keep pretending."

No one understood Xu Yourong more than her.

She knew how eccentric Xu Yourong's personality was, how completely different it was from what she showed on the surface.

Xu Yourong glared at Chen Changsheng and walked out of the courtyard.

Chen Changsheng's arms had been spread wide open the entire time so as to avoid touching Mo Yu's body. He looked extremely innocent.

Only when she saw Xu Yourong leave did Mo Yu stop hugging him.

They were the only people left in the pavilion.

The mood was rather warm and naturally rather awkward, especially for Chen Changsheng.

This was the case whether it was Mo Yu who intentionally made Xu Yourong leave in a huff or it was Xu Yourong giving them this chance to be alone.

An uproar suddenly came from the front courtyard, so Chen Changsheng hurriedly said, "His Highness seems to have rather decent relationships with other people."

"Something like relationships primarily depends on whether someone can be a threat to you, so my relationships have always been bad."

Mo Yu said, "None of those brothers and even nephews of his have ever thought much of him, but... people like the Prince of Zhongshan and the Prince of Luling can be considered to like him. After all, he's the only weirdo of the Chen clan who has no interest in power or glory, not a single bit of ambition, and a nerve so weak it's pitiful."

The Prince of Louyang was very famous for his good-for-nothing

personality, but it was not appropriate for Chen Changsheng to say anything more.

Mo Yu suddenly looked at him and sternly asked, "Do you know what Prince Chen Liu said in the Monastery of Eternal Spring?"

Hearing these words, Chen Changsheng was finally sure that she had intentionally had Xu Yourong leave in a huff.

"Prince Chen Liu said that she's going crazy."

Mo Yu stared into his eyes. "I trust in his judgment."

Chen Changsheng was stunned for a moment, then said, "I don't understand your meaning."

"When she was very young, I, Prince Chen Liu, and Ping recognized her for what she was. Only we know just what sort of person she really is. She's not like the common people imagine, the Holy Maiden that doesn't partake of mortal foods, nor is she some pure and noble lady. She clearly knows her goal and is extremely cold to this world, and you know what this means."

"You've already said these things to me. I don't believe she and the Divine Empress are the same type of person."

"All the things she's done recently have made you more vigilant?"

"Because I have not felt her coldness."

Mo Yu considered this, and she was forced to admit, "She treats you differently from the rest."

Chen Changsheng sincerely asked, "Then what do I have to worry about?"

Rather incensed, Mo Yu said, "Today is the happy day where I get married, so can you not flaunt in front of my face?"

Startled, Chen Changsheng asked, "What are we flaunting?"

"Tang Thirty-Six said it right."

Mo Yu resentfully spat, "You two are truly a fine couple of..."

Chen Changsheng suggested, "A golden boy and jade girl?"

Mo Yu sneered, "Understand it on your own."

Chapter 1066 – The Personnel Arrangements of the Li Palace

With the conclusion of the Prince of Louyang and Mo Yu's marriage, the people of the capital began to cast their gazes towards another marriage.

At present the Imperial Court could be considered as being divided into two factions. The old ministers represented by Eunuch Lin naturally could be considered part of the young emperor's group, and now, Mo Yu and the Prince of Louyang added to their number. Meanwhile, the Prince of Xiang, the Prince of Zhongshan, the other Chen princes, and the generals personally taught by Chen Guansong represented the other faction. The Tianhai clan, on the other hand, continued to waver between the factions. With the death of the Divine Empress, the Tianhai clan had naturally come under extreme pressure, but as a clan that had influenced the Imperial Court for two centuries, it still had resources and strength to pull. No one could disregard its existence.

The marriage between Prince Chen Liu and the Princess of Ping was, from a certain perspective, an alliance between the Prince of Xiang's estate and the Tianhai clan. As the emperor's relations on his mother's side, it was only right that the Tianhai clan stand on his side. But they had no intention of delaying this wedding. On the contrary, after Xu Yourong entered the palace, they moved the marriage up.

Tianhai Chenwu appeared much older than he was three years ago. It seemed that a cultivation level that was only half a step from the Divine was not enough to resist the power of time.

He looked at his son and ruefully sighed, "Perhaps you were right back then, but at this point, we can no longer turn back."

Tianhai Shengxue slightly frowned and said, "His Majesty will

still require our strength."

"But once this matter is concluded?"

A derisive smile appeared on Tianhai Chenwu's face.

"If His Majesty really does want to ally with Chen Changsheng, it means that he will come into conflict with the venerable Daoist. What reason do you think he will use?"

Tianhai Shengxue fell silent, making no attempts to persuade his father otherwise.

Every matter required a suitable reason, which gave rise to the saying, 'a sufficient reason is needed to send the troops'.

If the young emperor really did do this, and if he won, then those who betrayed the Tianhai Divine Empress at the critical moment back then would assuredly be punished.

As for the Tianhai clan, they would undoubtedly be the first to be purged.

.....

.....

This year's winter was particularly cold and seemed like it would never end.

But one day, the snow suddenly stopped and sun tore through the clouds, bathing the capital, the mountains, and the rivers in its light. The world instantly warmed as spring suddenly descended.

Spring had come and everything began to renew. Just like how the Luo River outside the capital began to flow once more, many matters that had been paused began to restart.

With the Pope returned to the capital, neither the Li Palace nor the Imperial Court had any reason to not hold the Grand Examination.

This grand occasion which had been halted for three years now

instantly attracted the attention of the entire continent.

Just like the arrival of spring, the news of the Grand Examination's revival was also rather sudden. There was naturally no time for any pre-examination, nor was there any Ivy Festival.

The teachers and students of the Six Ivies and the students from the various provincial academies quickly plunged themselves into study and cultivation. The disciples of the distant sects in the south, on the other hand, had already begun to prepare their luggage. The Longevity Sect was already waning, but there were still forty-some sects sending disciples to participate in this year's Grand Examination, including South Stream Temple, Scholartree Manor, and the Mount Li Sword Sect. Fortunately, there were no geniuses like the Divine Kingdom's Seven Laws this time, nor was there anyone like Scholartree Manor's Zhong Hui, so the Ivy Academies felt less pressure than in the past.

But this was the first Grand Examination since the ascension of the young Emperor and the Pope, so no one dared to take it lightly.

The Orthodoxy cavalry continuously patrolled around the walls of the Orthodox Academy and the peddlers were driven out of Hundred Flowers Lane. Those restaurants with rather significant backing had also been requested to limit their opening hours.

In the quiet Orthodox Academy, the only sounds to be heard were those of reading and clashing swords. Su Moyu was guiding the students taking part in the Grand Examination through the final preparations, and even Tang Thirty-Six stopped going to the Li Palace. He spent all day in the Orthodox Academy, keeping an eye on those students and occasionally delivering a harsh reprimand.

Chen Changsheng still held the post of Principal of the Orthodox Academy, but his status prevented him from doing anything, or even saying anything.

.....

.....

Seven days out from the Grand Examination, Tang Thirty-Six entered the Li Palace.

The Li Palace did not forbid priests from entering or exiting, but it was still just as cold and deserted as it had been for the past three years.

Perhaps it was because of the Grass Moon Hall, the Moss Institute, and the rest of the six halls, half of them were empty.

Candidates for the archbishop seats left empty by Mao Qiuyu, Daoist Baishi, and Mu Jiushi had still not been decided.

Hu Thirty-Two, who had replaced Mu Jiushi, simply had no energy to use on matters of the Hall of Announcements, all of it focused on handling the affairs of the Li Palace as a whole. Linghai Zhiwang was leading his black-clothed enforcers from the Hall of Heavenly Judgment in keeping an eye on the Imperial Court's activities. After Chen Changsheng returned to the capital, Daoist Siyuan quickly took his leave of the Hall of Subjugation, embarking on a most vital mission to preach to the various provinces and counties. Moreover, just ten days ago, An Hua had brought several hundred of the most fervent priests in joining this mission.

Tang Thirty-Six asked, "Who will take on the position of Archbishop of the Divine Edict?"

Chen Changsheng said, "Once three years have passed, she will return to preside over the Hall of Literary Glory."

By 'she', he meant Archbishop An Lin.

Tang Thirty-Six was somewhat shocked, but after thinking about it, he felt that it was the best choice.

In the end, Archbishop An Lin had not severely violated the laws of the church. She had just shown a lack of trust in Chen Changsheng.

Three years of bitter cultivation away from the capital was probably enough to repent for her errors. As someone who had come from the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green, she was truly more suitable for managing the Hall of Literary Glory.

Of course, he knew that Chen Changsheng had made such arrangements in part for An Hua's sake.

"Then what of the Archbishop of the Divine Edict?"

"Mm, I plan to give it to Luoluo... I'll think about how to deal with it after she ascends to the throne."

Tang Thirty-Six praised, "Wonderful!"

At the time, Mu Jiushi had used her status as Princess of the Great Western Continent to become Archbishop of the Hall of Announcements, as the Human race required the Great Western Continent's friendship. The Human race needed the Demi-human race as their ally even more, so who could say anything if Luoluo, the Princess of the Demi-human race and eighty thousand li away, also took the seat of Archbishop of the Divine Edict?

Tang Thirty-Six asked, "What about Principal Mao's side?"

Chen Changsheng said, "He recommended Zhuang Zhihuan, but I did not consent."

Tang Thirty-Six was struck dumb.

Mao Qiuyu had left not because of any mistake, but because he had broken into the Divine. If one were to use the Imperial Court as a model, he had been promoted.

Before he left, it was only natural that he give a recommendation as to who his successor in the Hall of Illustrious Persons should be, and it would normally not be rejected.

That Chen Changsheng had done this was an extreme disrespect to Mao Qiuyu and the Heavenly Dao Academy. As for Zhuang Zhihuan's feelings on the matter, those were easily imagined.

Tang Thirty-Six understood why Chen Changsheng did not consent to Zhuang Zhihuan. There was nothing emotional about it. It was just that the matter was very difficult to deal with. The status of the Hall of Illustrious Persons was very special. Compared to Zhuang Zhihuan, it would be very difficult to convince the masses if Chen Changsheng chose the archbishops of the Temple Seminary, the Li Palace Academy, or the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green. As for Tang Thirty-Six or Su Moyu of the Orthodox Academy, they were simply out of the question. Chen Changsheng could not leave an impression of nepotism on the faithful and besides, Tang Thirty-Six and Su Moyu were both truly lacking in experience.

Then just who would take the seat of Archbishop of the Hall of Illustrious Persons?

Chen Changsheng gave an unexpected name.

Guan Bai.

Chapter 1067 – Everyone Is Here

Guan Bai was the greatest pride of the Heavenly Dao Academy in these last few years, his status on par with Qiushan Jun's in the Mount Li Sword Sect. He was known as Famous Name Guan Bai.

This extremely talented young expert had suffered a heavy blow several years ago—one of his arms had been cut off by Wuqiong Bi.

But when everyone believed that he was about to wither away, he blew away their expectations by determinedly climbing from the abyss of despair. With diligent and strenuous cultivation, he regained his former strength, and coupled with his arduous battle in the north against demon experts over the last few years, his cultivation in the sword incessantly advanced. He charged through the threshold of the upper level of Star Condensation and his position on the Proclamation of Liberation was fast approaching Liang Wangsun and Xiaode.

If Chen Changsheng chose Guan Bai to be Archbishop of the Hall of Illustrious Persons, such a moral person with such sterling achievements, legendary experience, and a background in the Heavenly Dao Academy would receive widespread support. Even if someone did want to question Chen Changsheng, it would be difficult to directly voice their concerns.

"The surprising choice is often a rather excellent choice."

Tang Thirty-Six creased his brow and said, "The only problem is that his experience is a little shallow, and also... he's Zhuang Zhihuan's student. To have the student manage the teacher is a rather strange feeling, and I think that even Guan Bai himself would find it hard to bear."

Chen Changsheng said, "He's probably coming back for this Grand Examination. When the time comes, I'll try my best to convince him."

In the Boiling Stone Summit on Mount Han, Guan Bai had fought with Chen Changsheng, and Chen Changsheng had returned to the capital with serious injuries, indirectly leading to those events that shook the world. Guan Bai, on the other hand, had gone to Snowhold Pass, defending against the demons in that world of snow and ice for three years.

In these three years, Chen Changsheng had also been in the mountains of the north, but he had never gone to meet Guan Bai.

The room suddenly fell silent.

Because Snowhold Pass and the Proclamation of Liberation that Guan Bai was on had made Chen Changsheng and Tang Thirty-Six recall a person.

Xiao Zhang had been pursued across the world by the assassins from the Great Zhou Army and the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets, and had ultimately been forced into the north. It was said that the two sides had engaged in a bloody battle at Snowhold Pass, after which Xiao Zhang vanished into the snowy plains. No one knew whether he was still alive, and what he would do if so.

As they thought about that chain over the river, the tyrannical figure descending from the skies, the piece of paper flapping in the wind, the aroma of tea engulfing the entire city, and those tea merchants who were heedless of death, Chen Changsheng and Tang Thirty-Six remained quiet for a very long time.

"Let's talk about a few proper matters."

Tang Thirty-Six did not like this sort of oppressive mood. "When will you give the questions to me?"

Chen Changsheng was very confused and did not understand what he meant.

Tang Thirty-Six glanced outside the hall and then whispered, "The literary test isn't necessary. I only need the martial test."

Chen Changsheng blankly stared for quite some time before he

finally got it. Opening his eyes wide, he asked, "You want me to leak the questions?"

Seeing those bright and clear eyes, free of impurity, Tang Thirty-Six felt somewhat ashamed, and then inexplicably angry.

"Don't forget that you're also the Principal of the Orthodox Academy! What's wrong with seeking an advantage for the students? If it wasn't for Priest Xin back then specifically coming over to leak the questions to us, would that rigid and inflexible brain of yours be able to think about borrowing Xu Yourong's crane to cross the Qu River?"

Normally, Chen Changsheng might have responded by very earnestly saying, "Is this what it means to get angry from embarrassment?" But he did not say it today, because he had heard Priest Xin's name, which had once more made him recall that city brimming with the aroma of tea.

Chen Changsheng walked to the window and silently looked out.

Priest Xin was dead, Archbishop Mei Lisha had died long ago, and his martial uncle the Pope was also dead.

This Li Palace was now his, but it was also foreign to him, because all those people he was familiar with were no longer here.

The Li Palace now was rather cold and cheerless, but its will was even more united. Yet this was still not enough to directly confront the Great Zhou Imperial Court.

The most critical problem was that his master Shang Xingzhou's prestige in the Orthodoxy was too high.

If it really did come down to a war, though there would probably be no defections, at least a third of the Li Palace's priests would choose to remain silent or retreat.

As spring began to pervade the air, the ivy growing on the stone walls of the Li Palace gradually began to reveal its alluring green.

The sight of these stone walls made him think back to his first look at the Orthodox Academy. Chen Changsheng felt somewhat emotional.

From a certain standpoint, from the moment he was born to the moment he entered the Orthodox Academy, his entire life had been planned out by Shang Xingzhou.

He had a very complicated attitude toward Shang Xingzhou.

Shang Xingzhou probably felt the same toward him.

He had originally believed that the events of White Emperor City could be a turning point.

Since he had been tacitly allowed to return to the capital, a discussion would be had between this master and disciple, whether it would end up in war or peace.

But who could have expected that Shang Xingzhou would go to Luoyang...

Master is not even willing to see me?

The cry of a goose broke Chen Changsheng out of his pensive mood.

Several garish red streaks flew over the tender green ivy and across the azure blue sky.

These were Red Geese, carrying messages.

"What's happened?"

Tang Thirty-Six walked up to his side. As he saw those Red Geese landing in different parts of the capital, he suddenly felt uneasy.

In a short time, Hu Thirty-Two came by and said, "Everyone participating in the Grand Examination has arrived."

This news did not dispel the unease in Tang Thirty-Six's heart. On the contrary, it worsened.

Although the Grand Examination was a grand affair, there was

no need for the Li Palace and the Imperial Court to use so many Red Geese at the same time to send urgent messages.

"Just who has come?"

"The information I have received on my end is not complete."

Hu Thirty-Two glanced at Chen Changsheng and continued, "Quite a lot of people should have arrived."

Not long after, Linghai Zhiwang hurried in from outside the Li Palace and declared, "Everyone is here."

Even someone as proud and emotionless as him couldn't stop his voice from trembling as he said this.

It naturally wasn't fear, but excitement.

.....

.....

.....

.....

The students taking part in the Grand Examination came in from all parts of the continent to the capital, with many of them coming from the south.

The south had many sects, its noble clans all had deep resources, and it had numerous experts and masters. Over the last few years, as the Mount Li Sword Sect and Scholartree Manor rose in prestige, the number of cultivators it contributed to the younger generation far exceeded that of the Ivy Academies, which represented the northern powers. However, the capital was quaking today not because of the pressure brought by the students of the south, but because too many teachers and elders had come with them, and all of them were of resounding reputation!

Only two disciples from the Mount Li Sword Sect were taking part in the Grand Examination, but they were accompanied by ten-some people. This was in stark contrast to the light and easygoing

manner in which Gou Hanshi's group had come to participate in the Grand Examination, and this current group of ten-some people also included the stunning young geniuses of the sword that were Gou Hanshi, Guan Feibai, Liang Banhu, and Bai Cai. As for the rest of the group, they were even more terrifying, as they were all upper level Star Condensation elders of the Sword Hall!

Only one disciple from South Stream Temple was taking part in the Grand Examination, but all the disciples of Holy Maiden Peak had come.

All the people of the capital were dumbstruck by the drifting white robes of the several hundred maidens.

The chief of Gentle Stream Monastery, the new Sect Master of the Blazing Sun Sect, and the experts of thirty-some other sects of the south had also entered the capital.

The Old Lady of the Mutuo clan and the head of the Wu clan, three years after the coup of the Mausoleum of Books, entered the capital once more.

On a certain mountain outside the capital, somebody had even seen the carriage of the Qiushan clan.

Linghai Zhiwang's words were extremely accurate.

Every expert of the south that anyone could think of, other than the Mount Li Sword Sect Master and those other elders who had been secluded for many years, had come to the capital.

No one knew that two Daoist nuns of ambiguous age had silently entered the capital and were now residing in the Prince of Louyang's old estate.

But people did know that Wang Po had come with his blade.

Because a crack had appeared on the Luo River.

In the space of a single night, the trees outside the Imperial Palace turned yellow as if transformed into ginkgo trees.

Chapter 1068 – Everything Began from White Emperor City

As news began to pour in, the Li Palace ceased to be so cold and cheerless. The bishops and deacons stood on the plaza and engaged in whispered discussion. As they waited for an order from the Pope or the archbishops, they all had different expressions.

It could be presumed that the Imperial Court was even more nervous at this moment, and it was hard to imagine what the princes and ministers were doing.

South Stream Temple, Mount Li, the Mutuo clan... they had all arrived at the capital on the same day. It had to be intentional. After the confluence of the north and south, the Imperial Court had relaxed its vigilance over the sects of the south. Moreover, since they had the Grand Examination as cover, no one had gotten any news of this beforehand.

Who across the continent could arrange for such a major event? Of course, it was Xu Yourong, because she was the Holy Maiden, but what did she want to do? Did she want to use this hurricane of momentum to threaten the palace? Would the venerable Daoist Shang Xingzhou still be able to quietly remain in Luoyang?

When they thought of these things, the Li Palace priests turned toward that secluded palace in the depths of the Li Palace.

Tang Thirty-Six, Linghai Zhiwang, and Hu Thirty-Two were also looking at Chen Changsheng.

Chen Changsheng said nothing, nor did he give any order. With a calm expression, he walked back into the hall.

Linghai Zhiwang was somewhat confused, but he understood the general meaning and turned around, walking out of the Li Palace.

Tang Thirty-Six followed Chen Changsheng back into the hall and asked, "What do you intend to do?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "I intend to practice the sword."

Tang Thirty-Six froze.

The sky today was exceptionally blue. Cut apart as it was by the eaves of the hall, it looked just like a porcelain tile.

The soft gurgling of flowing water could be heard exceptionally well in the slightly dim confines of the hall.

The clear water in the stone pool undulated with ripples that would never cease. A ladle sat quietly by the pool.

The Green Leaf had already been returned to the place it had existed in for many years. Although it was missing a leaf, it was still a pleasant green.

Chen Changsheng did not enter the Green Leaf World. Instead, he walked into a quiet stone room deep within the hall.

The room was devoid of furniture or tools, and its walls and ground were made from gray stone. It was abnormally plain, crude.

A prayer mat was placed on the floor, and it looked rather worn.

The prayer mat naturally made Tang Thirty-Six think of the one in Wenshui's ancestral hall, causing him to stop.

Chen Changsheng sat on the prayer mat and extended his right hand.

A wind did not stir within the stone room and his sleeve did not tremble, but his fingertip vibrated.

There was a light clap.

A flick of the finger.

With a clear crack, several thousand swords streamed out of the sheath at Chen Changsheng's waist, occupying all the space in the stone chamber.

Countless awe-inspiring sword intents began to rise and fall

within the stone chamber, jolting and intersecting against each other before they gradually calmed down.

Looking into the stone chamber, one would see a sea of swords with Chen Changsheng sitting in the very middle.

Tang Thirty-Six felt a chill in his eyes at this sight, and then realized that one of his eyelashes was drifting down.

With a grinding sound, the door to the stone chamber slowly closed, accompanied by Chen Changsheng closing his eyes as well.

As he walked out of the hall, Tang Thirty-Six asked Hu Thirty-Two, "What's going on there?"

Hu Thirty-Two replied, "His Holiness had always been diligently cultivating."

Tang Thirty-Six found this rather absurd. "He's still thinking about practicing his sword at this sort of moment?"

"Yes." Hu Thirty-Two was a little worried, adding, "After meeting the Holy Maiden that day, His Holiness stopped caring about anything else."

Tang Thirty-Six felt rather uneasy, because this scene gave off a rather familiar feeling.

.....

.....

Countless gazes within the capital all rested upon the Xu Estate.

In these last few days, Xu Yourong had stopped meeting people. Instead, she chose to quietly remain at home.

But everyone knew that this matter had to do with her and the people she had met.

Before she met Prince Chen Liu, before she met the emperor late in the night within the palace, she had met many people in the south over the last few years.

These people had all come. They came from the south, her south.

"The Holy Maiden's pressure is too much. Sir, as her father, you should at least speak with her about it."

The Divine General of the East's estate was always somber and quiet, so the voice from the reception hall seemed louder than it really was.

It was obvious that this person was suppressing the anger in his heart.

The speaker was the Eastern Stallion Divine General, Peng Shihai.

Being forced to express a stance on the matter, Xu Shiji looked at the general with a nasty complexion.

In terms of status, Peng Shihai was lower than Xu Shiji, and in terms of seniority, he was far inferior. But he was a student of the now-deceased Principal of Star Seizer Academy, Chen Guansong, so he did not represent himself alone. He represented the will of the Divine Generals that now controlled the army and perhaps even the will of the venerable Daoist.

Xu Shiji suppressed his own vexation and replied, "Although the relationship between me and the Holy Maiden is that of father and daughter, it is also one of the subject and his lord. What do you think I can say?"

Peng Shihai gave a cold laugh and said, "If Sir finds it inconvenient to speak, then I'll do it. I want to meet the Holy Maiden to demand a full account!"

Xu Shiji could no longer restrain himself and harshly said, "I said that she isn't here! It's your choice if you want to believe it!"

.....

.....

Xu Yourong truly was not at home today.

On a day of such clear weather, she unfurled the Yellow Paper Umbrella and strolled through the streets of the capital.

A few days ago, she had gone to the Li Palace and requested the umbrella from Chen Changsheng, perhaps because she had already believed that she would need it to walk around today.

At her side was a girl dressed in black.

Everyone on the streets was talking about today's events, with the chatter from the tea houses and restaurants being especially loud.

The black-clothed girl had an indifferent expression and monstrous vertical pupils. She was very beautiful, but also somewhat odd, as she had a penchant for incessantly stuffing snacks into her mouth.

As she listened to these conversations, she mumbled , "You began preparing for this in White Emperor City?"

Xu Yourong smiled. "Yes, while you were pursuing that Angel from the other continent."

The little Black Dragon saw something and her eyes chilled. A seedless candied date shot out of her hand.

A little boy that was currently bullying his younger sister suddenly bent at the knee and fell to the floor. He instantly began to cry.

Xu Yourong shook her head.

The Black Dragon clapped her hands, ice crystals splashing out from her palms. She asked, "Why did you start then?"

Xu Yourong said, "Because it was only then that I was sure that Shang Xingzhou had suffered significant injuries."

The little Black Dragon turned blank for a moment, then asked, "He was injured?"

Xu Yourong affirmed, "Yes."

The Black Dragon knew how important this information was. Her pupils constricted as she asked, "How did you confirm it?"

Xu Yourong said, "The White Emperor had just broken out of his prison at the time. Whether or not he was faking it, his cultivation level and energy were still not at their peak. Moreover, he also had to battle with two Angels of the Sacred Light while Shang Xingzhou did not, and Shang Xingzhou even had me as a helper."

The Black Dragon did not get her meaning.

Xu Yourong explained, "In those circumstances, that Shang Xingzhou did not attempt to kill the White Emperor could only mean that he had also suffered significant injuries."

The Black Dragon was flabbergasted. "Aren't they friends?"

Xu Yourong only smiled in reply.

The Black Dragon then realized that she had also said that Shang Xingzhou had her as a helper, shocking her even further.

"If he really did attack the White Emperor then, would you really have helped him?"

Xu Yourong calmly replied, "Of course I would help him. In truth, I had already prepared myself to strike at the time."

The Black Dragon thought for a while, then asked, "These are just your speculations?"

Xu Yourong indifferently said, "That he and the White Emperor did not continue to attack that Angel but passed that on to you was so that they could guard against each other."

The little Black Dragon had not yet matured, but she was not lacking in intelligence. As she recalled the scene from back then, she quickly reached a conclusion.

After a very long period of silence, she said, "You humans are truly terrifying."

The lively crowds on both sides gradually vanished as the street

gradually widened.

Xu Yourong and the Black Dragon had come to a quiet street.

If Mo Yu were here, she would be able to tell at a glance that this place was extremely close to the Road of Peace.

The little Black Dragon asked, "I thought you wanted to visit the girls of South Stream Temple, so why did we come here?"

Xu Yourong said, "I came to see two elders."

The little Black Dragon found this thoroughly uninteresting and vanished in a gust of icy wind.

Xu Yourong walked to the rear gate of an estate.

The gate slowly opened.

Xu Yourong looked at the two Daoist nuns and said, "I have troubled my two martial aunts."

Chapter 1069 – The Tile on the Corner of the Roof

The two Daoist nuns were Huai Ren and Huai Shu. After the internal strife of South Stream Temple, they had restarted their travels. Based on the agreement, they could at least return to Holy Maiden Peak every ten years for the grand ceremony to the stars. No one would have expected them to have stealthily entered the capital and taken up residence in the Prince of Louyang's old estate.

At Xu Yourong's words, Huai Ren calmly replied, "Temple Master's words are of utmost importance, and this deed will let us atone for our crimes."

Huai Shu recalled that bloody light in South Stream Temple and found it hard to control her rage. She said, "Shang Xingzhou used Huai Bi to stir a storm, so how can we act as he desires?"

Huai Ren calmly said, "If our Dao hearts had been calm, how could we have been used by him?"

Her senior sister's words caused Huai Shu to restrain her anger. She looked at Xu Yourong and gave her an admiring and grateful gaze, then nodded her head and said no more.

The several hundred disciples of South Stream Temple entering the capital today had sent massive shocks throughout the populace. An elder like Huai Shu naturally took great pleasure in seeing such unprecedented brilliance.

In the past, if South Stream Temple had made such a display of power, before the Great Zhou Imperial Court would even have time to say anything, the Li Palace would have already taken action.

Fortunately, the Li Palace was in a standoff with the Great Zhou Imperial Court, increasing the importance of the southern sects

and giving South Stream Temple this sort of opportunity.

Of course, creating such an array of forces and seizing this opportunity was also an extremely difficult task.

Xu Yourong was still very young and had not yet entered the Divine Domain. Unlike the previous Holy Maiden, she could sufficiently intimidate the Great Zhou Imperial Court. But her relationship with the Li Palace was the closest of all Holy Maidens'. Moreover, the motivational power and determination she had displayed in this matter were truly worthy of respect.

A fake mountain was erected behind the estate's rear gate, with several jade-green plants growing on it.

A cold wind blew through, covering the leaves of those plants in a thin layer of frost.

"Everything's fine at the Xue clan. Do you want me to tell Chen Changsheng?"

A black-clothed girl appeared and spoke to Xu Yourong.

Sensing the rapid drop of temperature within the princely estate, Huai Shu quickly guessed this girl's identity. Her complexion slightly changed as she subconsciously took a step back.

In her travels around the world with her senior sister, she had seen many impressive sights and strange people. Logically speaking, an expert half a step from the Divine should not have made her feel fear.

But Black Frost Dragons were divine creatures of the highest level, innately pressuring the souls of human experts.

The little Black Dragon had gotten used to this sort of response and she did not much care, but the other Daoist nun had attracted her interest.

Huai Ren had a very calm expression and had not been affected by her appearance. She acted like she did not know of the Black

Dragon's background.

The little Black Dragon took measure of her and then said, "You're very strong."

There were few people on this continent that she felt were strong.

In South Stream Temple's internal strife, Huai Bi had suddenly used the Divine Finger of the Worldstream to seal Huai Ren's most important Qi openings. Despite being forced into a passive state, Huai Ren had still been easily able to reverse the situation. At the time, Chen Changsheng had felt that this Daoist nun had an unfathomable level of strength.

The Black Dragon turned to Xu Yourong, somewhat shocked and rather confused.

Just what was she planning to do by inviting an expert like this to live in the Prince of Louyang's old estate?

Xu Yourong said nothing, only gazed at a nearby estate.

This estate was screened by high walls, making it impossible to see the luxurious buildings within. All that was visible were the high eaves of its roofs.

Sculptures of beasts were crouched at the corners of these eaves, adorned in golden scales, seeming both like a dragon and not a dragon.

.....

.....

The Prince of Xiang's face began to twitch, fat rippling, as he gazed at those dragon-like beasts on the corners of the roofs glimmering gold in the sunlight.

After some time, he looked away and held up the fat of his belly that was bulging past his belt. He sighed, "This matter has gotten big."

Prince Chen Liu bitterly smiled. "I didn't expect that Yourong was still doing things as crudely and simply as when she was young."

The Prince of Xiang looked into his son's eyes and slowly and solemnly said, "With as many years as your father has served the venerable Daoist, as long as I do not act rashly, I am assured my present honor and riches. I will ask you again: do you still persist in your view that we should take another step forward?"

He was currently the most powerful and esteemed prince of the Imperial Court and was also an expert of the Divine Domain. If he were to take another step forward, where would it go?

"If we do not take this step, will the Great Zhou Dynasty be the Chen clan's world, or Xining's world?"

Prince Chen Liu calmly said, "This is the matter I care about the most."

The Prince of Xiang's finger sank into the fat of his belly. He constantly sighed but said nothing more.

.....

.....

Prince Chen Liu had just gotten married, but he had no mind to spare for his lovely wife, because Xu Yourong had made too great of a stir.

But his lovely wife, as beautiful as a flower, also had no time for her husband. She had left the princely estate and returned to the Tianhai clan.

Tianhai Shengxue stood in front of the estate's gate, looking at the Princess of Ping who, though already attired as a wife, still had her pampered expression. He advised, "Although your husband has a rather bland personality and is a deep thinker, it's not a bad personality, and he's always paid attention to his reputation. He won't treat you poorly, but you also have to pay some attention.

How can you run back immediately after getting married?"

"I came back to talk business, not to start up a love rivalry or any of those other dull games."

The Princess of Ping walked into the estate and sneered, "If we don't hurry and respond, are we just going to watch that woman get all the glory?"

Tianhai Shengxue knew that the Princess of Ping had held a deep grudge toward Xu Yourong ever since she was little, but he had not expected that three years after the Divine Empress's death, when the Princess of Ping no longer actually held her title, her grudges still remained. As time passed, they had even seemed to worsen.

She had returned to the estate today as a representative of the Prince of Xiang's estate to discuss with Tianhai Shengxue's father how to deal with the current situation. Tianhai Shengxue found this quite boring and had no desire to take part. He took the reins from one of the clan warriors and began to lead his horse out, but before he could get very far, a thin and tall elder appeared at his side.

This elder seemed rather ordinary, but his status was anything but. He was currently the most senior Divine General of the age and he was called Fei Dian.

Tianhai Shengxue said, "Although Sir has taught me much over the last few years, Sir staying by my side is truly just wasting time."

Fei Dian said, "Since the Divine Empress dispatched me to be by your side, it proves that you are worth it."

At the time, Tianhai Shengxue had been the youth with the most potential in all of the Tianhai clan. By ordering Fei Dian to stand at his side, the Divine Empress could be considered to have placed her high hopes on him.

But though the Divine Empress was now dead, Fei Dian did not seem to have any intention of leaving.

"Uncle Fei, what do you think is more interesting, remaining in the capital or going to the frontlines?"

Without waiting for an answer, Tianhai Shengxue shook his head and said, "It has to be fighting the demons on the snowy plains that's more interesting."

Fei Dian impassively looked forward and said, "But I am still alive right now."

A little surprised, Tianhai Shengxue glanced at him.

"General Han Qing is dead, Xue Xingchuan dead, Tian Chui is dead, and many other people have died. I hear that Jin Yulu's life in White Emperor City also isn't that great."

Fei Dian continued, "That I am still alive and can even drink a little wine every day is precisely because I think little, do little."

Tianhai Shengxue knew that these words were a warning to him.

His thoughts were very difficult to hide from Fei Dian.

But who could not have any thoughts on the situation in the capital?

He raised his head up to that sky so blue that it seemed like it had just been washed. "The storm is about to come, so one has to find a roof tile to cover one's head."

Chapter 1070 – The Fury of the Princes

Hundred Flowers Lane had experienced desolation, spectacle, destruction, and reconstruction. Its appearance from yesteryear had been replaced long ago, but it was more prosperous and yet quieter than before. Newly planted willow trees grew along the road. In the early spring, their new buds of light green were unable to conceal the eaves of the restaurants behind them.

Tianhai Shengxue gazed quietly for a very long time at the gate of the Orthodox Academy, deep within the lane.

The current gate had been built by the Tianhai clan, its old one having been rammed open at his order.

He thought back to that drizzling day in the capital, of how he had returned from the north with his subordinate cavalry and had a warhorse crash through the gate at his order. At the time, how brilliantly he and the Tianhai clan had shone, how arrogant they had been, but now?

After the coup of the Mausoleum of Books, other than when they carried out tasks assigned by the venerable Daoist or the emperor, the Tianhai clan was as inconspicuous as it could possibly make itself. This year, with great difficulties, they had finally prepared to demonstrate their power at the Mount Song Army headquarters and obtain some benefit for themselves, but they ended up encountering a major affair and that proud younger brother of his died.

As for Tianhai Ya'er, who had long ago brought the Tianhai clan into conflict with the Orthodox Academy, he had been forgotten long ago.

Fei Dian saw the desolate expression on his face and guessed at what he was thinking. He said, "If you've missed it, you've missed it. Let's go."

Tianhai Shengxue shook his head and spurred his horse into Hundred Flowers Lane.

Fei Dian appeared a little surprised. He silently watched Tianhai Shengxue enter.

Tianhai Shengxue was not merely passing by, but had come specifically to visit the Orthodox Academy, because he no longer wanted to keep missing out.

He knocked on the gate of the Orthodox Academy and then went inside.

His choice was the same as the one he had made in the Grand Examination.

He hoped that his clan could continue its succession, so he chose to bet everything on the other side.

He wanted to completely cut himself off from his clan so that even if the Tianhai clan was slaughtered to the man, he would survive.

.....

.....

Emperor Taizong had left behind many descendants. Even after so many years of trial and tribulation, after so many years of killing, quite a few of them still remained.

The princely estates lining the Road of Peace were proof.

The owners of these estates were all looking at the Prince of Xiang's estate.

If the Prince of Xiang did not give his stance on today's matter, the other princes could only remain silent.

The Road of Peace was extremely quiet.

But in one of the princely estates, one could hear an endless stream of curses, a string of obscenities so foul that they made

one's ears recoil in disgust.

It was the Prince of Zhongshan's estate.

Amongst the princes of the Chen clan, the Prince of Zhongshan, Chen Xuanqing, could be considered the most famous, in part due to his temper, and in part due to his legendary experience.

If he had not played the madman back then and eaten no small amount of horse feces, he would have been put to death by the Tianhai Divine Empress ages ago.

This matter also indirectly proved how outstanding this prince was. If he was just an ordinary prince, if he did not possess an extremely formidable strength, only slightly inferior to the Prince of Xiang, how could he have been forced to such measures by the Tianhai Divine Empress?

For such a powerful prince to be able to endure such humiliation was proof of how terrifying he was.

Especially when his complexion was as gloomy as it was now.

The vassals of the estate and experts loyal to him packed the room. The Xiaoling Divine General and the Prince of Luling, who had just hurried back from Mount Xiao, were also present.

Everyone had their heads bowed, none of them daring to meet the Prince of Zhongshan's gaze, much less speak.

This only further soured the Prince of Zhongshan's complexion. He pointed at them and cursed, "They're bullying us right in front of our door and all of you can still remain seated!"

At Mount Song, he had been forced to concede by the arrival of the three Prefects of the Orthodoxy and the unseen Chen Changsheng, which had already put him in a bad mood. Now, the experts of the southern sects had waltzed into the capital with an intimidating pressure, causing him to explode with fury.

His vassals kept their heads bowed, their mouths shut.

The Xiaoling Divine General looked at the Prince of Zhongshan and attempted to drum up his courage to speak, but he ultimately chose to take back his gaze.

The Prince of Luling helplessly shook his head.

If they couldn't sit, what else could they do? Go fight?

The Li Palace could easily find seven or eight peak Star Condensation experts like Linghai Zhiwang or Daoist Siyuan, and the Ivy Academies still had experts like Zhuang Zhihuan and the Archbishop of the Temple Seminary. Such were the Orthodoxy's foundational resources that had been built up over the millennia.

And Mao Qiuyu had already broken into the Divine. Although it was said that he had gone to Mount Han, who knew if he had sneaked back like Wang Po? And if Mao Qiuyu did not return, who could resist the combined sword arts of the Pope and the Holy Maiden? Coupled with those southern experts who had entered the capital, just how were they supposed to fight?

Unless they called back the black-armored cavalry from the north and besieged these experts, the Imperial Court had no chance of victory.

Although the Great Zhou Army had no small number of experts, the fiercest of their number, the White Tiger Divine General, had already been killed by Chen Changsheng and Zhexiu. The remaining Divine Generals were terribly lacking when compared to Xue Xingchuan's generation, and they had not even been of one mind in the first place.

"These disciples and granddisciples of Chen Guansong's really are incompetent! This prince might as well go fight instead!"

The Prince of Zhongshan glanced at the Xiaoling Divine General and cursed, "They're all f**king trash!"

The vassals all bitterly smiled in silence as they thought, Your Highness, even if you could fight, you're just one person, and Your

Highness still wouldn't be able to beat that person. As they all silently criticized the prince, they heard his following comment and were suddenly stricken with fear as they wondered, could His Highness possibly know what we're thinking?

The Prince of Zhongshan had no idea, nor did he have any mind to contemplate what his subordinates were thinking. These words were purely an emotional outburst.

"But I still can't beat Wang Po!

"It pisses me off!

"Pisses me off!"

.....

.....

Wang Po of Tianliang was unquestionably the expert that the Great Zhou Imperial Court had kept the closest eye on in the last few decades.

It was for the same reason that the Prince of Zhongshan regarded Wang Po so highly.

An irreconcilable grudge existed between the Chen clan and the Wang clan.

One recalled that Taizong had once made a comment that the weather had gotten cold, the result being the fall of the Wang clan.

Such was the origin of Wang Po's title.

If one could point out the one person that most hoped for the Chen Imperial clan to lose the world, it had to be Wang Po.

Thus, just when Wang Po began to reveal his talent for cultivation, the Chen Imperial clan was ready to suppress him, even eliminate him.

If it hadn't been for the Tang Old Master protecting him in Wenshui for several years, Wang Po would have probably have

been killed long ago.

Even after he ascended to the top of the Proclamation of Liberation and became an expert protected by the laws of the Divine, he was still forced into the distant south, where he entered Scholartree Manor.

Once Su Li went to the other continent, Wang Po became the number one elimination target for the Great Zhou Imperial Court.

After the coup of the Mausoleum of Books, the laws of the Divine lost their efficacy, so the Imperial Court set out to make their thoughts reality.

This resulted in that attempted encirclement around the ginkgo tree and the world-shaking battle by the Luo River.

But no one had expected Wang Po's cultivation to advance so quickly.

On the Luo River, he had killed Tie Shu with a single strike of his blade and entered the ranks of the Divine.

From that day, the entire situation changed.

The Great Zhou Imperial Court halted all their movements against Wang Po and the princes of the Chen clan fell silent. Both sides maintained a peaceful attitude.

But today, Wang Po had entered the capital.

The yellowed trees in front of the Imperial Palace and the crack on the Luo River were proof of this, or perhaps they could be called a letter of challenge.

Of course, it was a challenge to the Imperial Court.

To the princes of the Chen clan, this was even more a humiliation.

The Prince of Luling asked with a sour expression, "Then what do we do now?"

"What do we do?"

The Prince of Zhongshan slammed his hand against the table and roared, "We eat shit then! In any case, I've already eaten it for so many years, so there's no fear of doing it again!"

Chapter 1071 – The Head of the Great Clan Who Has Shown Up

No one was willing to eat feces—not dog feces, horse feces, or any other sort of feces.

And these princes of the Chen clan had just returned to the capital and ascended to the summit of human existence. Which one of them would happily go back to eating feces?

The Prince of Zhongshan was not happy, nor was the Prince of Luling. Even that absolute good-for-nothing the Prince of Louyang was probably also not happy.

But Wang Po had come to the capital and they could do nothing about it. This was what was meant by eating feces.

The only exception was if the Prince of Xiang personally came forward.

The problem was that everyone knew why Prince Chen Liu had gone to Luoyang, and they also knew why the Prince of Xiang's estate was so quiet today.

When he thought about what happened that night, the Prince of Zhongshan's face turned even nastier as he coldly cursed, "Truly an ambitious pack of wolves, a greed that can never be satisfied!"

Even if the Prince of Xiang did appear, the matter wasn't guaranteed to be settled.

Wang Po was that sharpest of blades.

Behind him were Scholartree Manor, Mount Li, Holy Maiden Peak, and the several dozen other sects and noble clans of the south.

This was too great a mobilization, too astonishing. It shocked the capital and awed the world.

The Li Palace remained silent to Xu Yourong's arrangements, as did the Imperial Palace.

The two martial brothers that were the Emperor and the Pope said nothing at all, but this did not mean that they would do nothing.

If Shang Xingzhou did not react, if the response of the Imperial Court and these princes was a little weak, these martial brothers could borrow the massive waves, pushed forward by Xu Yourong's powers of mobilization and daring, in order to remove the authority of the princes and those Divine Generals, completely altering the structure of the Imperial Court.

Only if Shang Xingzhou immediately returned to the capital was there a chance of staunching this wave, as only he had sufficient prestige and ability.

Or else the princes of the Chen clan would have to summon the troops back to the capital to protect themselves.

In the unending flames of war, nobody could know what the final result would be.

This was also what puzzled the Prince of Luling and the Xiaoling Divine General.

Why was Xu Yourong doing this?

In her capacity as Holy Maiden, did she really hope to see the chaos of war, the people drifting aimlessly across the land, and the fine future of the Human race going up in flames?

The Prince of Zhongshan took a glance at the sky while he listened to the cries of geese in the distance. A glint of light flashed across his slightly squinted eyes.

He had gone over the entire matter twice in his mind and ultimately obtained one conclusion.

It seemed like the true conclusion, but it was so simple that he

could hardly believe it.

Was Xu Yourong doing all these things just to force the venerable Daoist to return to the capital?

But if the venerable Daoist really did return, what could she do?

No matter how many experts of the south were present, how deep the resources of the Orthodoxy were, and how formidable Wang Po's power was, or how indescribably exquisite her and Chen Changsheng's harmonious sword art was...

Could they really manage to kill the venerable Daoist?

.....

.....

Many people could not understand Xu Yourong's objective in doing all these things.

They also could not understand how she could order so many sects and noble clans to come to the capital.

Her status in the south was naturally one of incredible esteem and she had a grand prestige.

But this was truly a major event, one that could invite a massacre.

The priests who were leading the experts from the south and their disciples to their respective halls were also troubled by these questions, but they could not bring themselves to voice them.

With the excuse of the Grand Examination, the sects and clans of the south had sent more than two thousand people into the capital. So many people naturally could not be housed in inns, so it was arranged for them to stay in the Li Palace, the Ivy Academies, and all the Daoist churches, big and small, within the capital. Chen Changsheng gave no opinion on the matter, and Hu Thirty-Two handled the matter very properly, with no problems cropping up.

At the start, it was inevitable that both sides felt a little strange

around each other, but after a little time getting acquainted, no one was willing to miss out on this hard-sought opportunity for the north and south to interact. In a short time, within the Li Palace, the Ivy Academies, and the Daoist churches, the two sides began to exchange pointers, but they spent most of the time discussing the Dao so as to avoid damaging their relationship.

Wealthy clans like the Mutuo clan and the Wu clan naturally had their own residences in the capital and did not need to be lodged elsewhere. And the members of these clans who were stationed in the capital could also just ask their clan heads... Why were they willing to obey the Holy Maiden's order and enter the capital?

The Old Lady of the Mutuo clan sank her feet into hot water and let out a sigh of exhaustion. She then said, "The foundations of our clans are in the south, not the north."

From this standpoint, the decree of Holy Maiden Peak was naturally more important than decrees from the Imperial Court, but the strength of the Mutuo clan meant that even if they ignored Xu Yourong's words, what could she do?

In the eyes of the Mutuo clan's descendants and the people of the capital, Xu Yourong was a shockingly talented Phoenix, was the revered Holy Maiden.

She was not a schemer, so logically speaking, she should not have been skilled in using force, much less more cold-blooded methods. Moreover, she also did not have such an ability.

"None of you know what sort of person the Holy Maiden is."

The Old Lady of the Mutuo clan seemed to be recalling something, fear appearing in her eyes as she said, "She's a madwoman."

In a nearby estate, just as luxurious, the Wu clan head was engaging in a similar conversation with his younger brother, the Assistant Minister of Revenue.

The Wu clan head sighed and said, "You don't know how scary the Holy Maiden can get once she goes crazy."

Assistant Minister Wu made a jeering expression, clearly not believing in these words.

The Wu clan head did not explain more. He only ruefully said, "None of you have the experience, so you naturally won't be afraid, but I really am afraid."

Assistant Minister Wu had no idea what had happened, but he subconsciously felt a chill. He asked, "What about the Qiushan clan?"

Many things had happened in Wenshui City and Tang Thirty-Six had left the ancestral hall. Everyone knew that the Tang Old Master had changed his stance.

In the conflict between Shang Xingzhou and Chen Changsheng, he had chosen to maintain a neutral stance.

Of the Four Great Clans, only the Qiushan clan's stance was not clear, and the Qiushan clan head had not been spotted amongst the group entering the capital.

"That old fox has it the worst. Normally, he's used to flipping between both sides, but he doesn't even need to make his stance known this time. Everyone already knows which side he'll stand on."

The Wu clan head suddenly felt a lot better as he jeered, "No one made him father such a good son."

.....

.....

Outside the capital was a Daoist temple called Tanzhe.

In the rear courtyard of this temple was a ginkgo tree, said to have been personally planted by Emperor Taizong a thousand years ago.

It was a flourishing ginkgo tree. In the golden autumn, its leaves would yellow and become a golden waterfall.

Three years ago, when Wang Po entered the capital to kill Zhou Tong, he had spent eleven days beneath this ginkgo tree, quietly comprehending the blade, after which he slew Tie Shu with one stunning strike on the Luo River.

It was early spring, so the leaves of the ginkgo tree were naturally not yellow, nor could Wang Po be found there.

The Qiushan clan head walked out of the Daoist temple and sat on the ice-cold stone chair. He sighed three times.

He had also come to the capital, but he had not entered. Instead, he had gone to Tanzhe Temple.

He wanted to find Wang Po and advise him to go to Luoyang.

In short, he did not want Shang Xingzhou to return to the capital, and he certainly did not want Shang Xingzhou to see him.

Because he was extremely pessimistic on Xu Yourong's chances.

He did not want to be implicated in the aftermath.

"What if... we go back?"

The Qiushan clan Guardian of unfathomable cultivation looked sympathetically at the Qiushan clan head's furrowed brow.

"Even if we didn't come, do you think the Imperial Court would believe that unfilial son?"

The Qiushan clan head sighed. "Since we've already shown up, let's stay for a few days."

Chapter 1072 – That Master and Disciple Who Just Won't Come Out

The Mount Li Sword Sect and South Stream Temple were both being lodged at the Orthodox Academy.

Gou Hanshi's group and Ye Xiaolian's group were both very familiar with each other, and they were also very familiar with the people of the Orthodox Academy.

The moment Tang Thirty-Six and Guan Feibai met, they began to engage in their old routines of frigid irony and scorching satire, calling each other all kinds of wonderful names and issuing every kind of jeer.

Everyone else had already gotten used to this sight and was rather bored of it. Too lazy to mediate, they retired to the rooms Su Moyu had arranged for them to wash up and rest.

On the same night, a sumptuous feast was held in the Orthodox Academy. The small kitchen on the other side of the lake was once more put to use, and a few of the thinner blue lobsters were even sent over for free, much to the pleasure of Ye Xiaolian and the other girls of South Stream Temple. However, the Mount Li Sword Sect disciples, who were born in poverty, still found it somewhat difficult to accustom themselves to a life of luxury.

Of course, Guan Feibai took the chance to jeer at Tang Thirty-Six again.

As the night deepened, though the bonfires along the lake were not yet extinguished, several of the Mount Li Sword Hall elders, Ping Xuan, and Yi Chen brought away the members of their sects that did not like excitement, but Tang Thirty-Six was not prepared to let the festivities end. He called over Chen Fugui, Fu Xinzhi, and Chu Wenbin and had them compete with Bai Cai and the others in drinking wine. For a moment, a fierce battle stirred and it seemed

like time had gone back to that year's Ivy Festival.

Gou Hanshi laughed at this scene, then, unnoticed, he turned and walked toward that house in the darkness.

On the balcony at the top floor of the house, he saw Chen Changsheng bathed in the starlight.

Gou Hanshi calmly and earnestly bowed, then he sighed. "Just getting a meeting with you now is truly very difficult."

He did not address Chen Changsheng respectfully because he had already bowed to the Pope. He was now speaking with an old friend.

His comment also had two meanings.

Other than the effects brought about by Chen Changsheng's change in status, Chen Changsheng had also spent the last few days deep within the Li Palace, never once showing his face.

Whether it was an old friend like Gou Hanshi or an influential figure like the Mutuo Clan's Old Lady, they found it very hard to meet with him.

No one understood how Chen Changsheng was able to remain so calm at such a tense moment, acting like this matter had nothing to do with him.

Was he not worried about unrest in the capital and the specter of war?

Chen Changsheng explained to Gou Hanshi, "I've spent the last few days practicing my sword."

This had been the explanation the Li Palace had made to the world.

Gou Hanshi could sense his Qi and was sure that he was still very far from that threshold, which confused him even more.

At such a tense moment, if there was still no chance of breakthrough, how could one put all their mind on cultivation?

Even if you want to do this, how can you calm your mind? Are you not worried about walking the path to madness?

Gou Hanshi suddenly saw Chen Changsheng's eyes and vaguely understood something.

Chen Changsheng's eyes were bright and clean, like the clearest of streams, free of the smallest impurity.

How could one calm one's heart? Only if one's mind was at peace.

Gou Hanshi asked, "Just what is Junior Sister Yourong planning to do?"

Chen Changsheng shook his head. "I really don't know."

Startled, Gou Hanshi asked, "Then how can you be so calm?"

Chen Changsheng did not directly answer the question. Instead, he asked, "Before coming, what did your senior brother say?"

Gou Hanshi smiled at these words, as he now essentially understood everything.

Before the disciples of the Mount Li Sword Sect set off, Qiushan Jun had not said anything, nor had he given any sort of order, because the entire continent knew how he would choose.

Even if Xu Yourong had decided to flip over the world, Qiushan Jun would still support her.

Chen Changsheng could naturally do this as well.

Gou Hanshi walked to the edge of the balcony, looking down at the bonfires along the lake and the lights of countless homes beyond the academy walls. "This matter is truly very difficult."

He was well-versed in the Daoist Canon and was the strategist for Mount Li. On the journey, he had attempted to deduce Xu Yourong's thoughts ten-some times, all of them pointing to the same place.

Even now, no one was sure what Xu Yourong wanted to do, but

some people had obtained the same conclusion.

Both involved killing people, but compared to the killing of Zhou Tong attempted by Wang Po and Chen Changsheng three years ago on that snowy day, it was many times more difficult to kill the person that Xu Yourong wanted to kill.

Chen Changsheng said, "Perhaps you are all wrong."

Gou Hanshi thought, Junior Sister has created such a display that she won't just give up.

Chen Changsheng said, "I feel that she will choose a simpler method."

Gou Hanshi felt he understood what was being implied and asked, "He is your master. Do you think he will agree?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "I think there's a forty percent chance."

Gou Hanshi asked, "Victory?"

Chen Changsheng pondered the question, then replied, "Still forty percent?"

Gou Hanshi shook his head and said, "Only twenty percent."

This was his view, Qiushan Jun's view, and the view of the Mount Li Sword Sect Master.

Wang Po had only a twenty percent chance of defeating Shang Xingzhou.

Chen Changsheng knew that his insight in this aspect was inferior to the Mount Li Sword Sect's, so he fell silent.

Gou Hanshi suddenly asked, "If Shang Xingzhou doesn't return?"

After some thought, Chen Changsheng answered, "I don't know."

Gou Hanshi looked at him and said, "I must know."

Chen Changsheng gazed at the lights of the capital's countless homes and thought of that night three years ago, his eyes turning

grave.

"I only know that I don't like people dying and I don't like war, especially here."

After a pause, Gou Hanshi said, "This is a blessing for all the people."

Chen Changsheng bid him farewell, but he did not leave immediately. Instead, he went to a room on the first floor.

It was the outermost room, guarding the stairs—Zhexiu's room.

Chen Changsheng opened the wardrobe and gazed pensively at the thin garment within.

.....

.....

Just like three years ago, everyone knew that Wang Po had come to the capital, but no one knew where he was.

Some went to the ginkgo tree of Tanzhe Temple, and others searched day and night for him by the shores of the Luo River, but not a trace of him could be found.

If the present Wang Po did not want to be seen, who besides Shang Xingzhou would be able to see him?

From a certain perspective, he was only willing to be seen by Shang Xingzhou.

On a certain morning, the tense atmosphere manifested into reality.

In a single night, the Imperial Palace received several dozen memorials.

These memorials came from the princely estates, the ministries, and the young and vigorous military factions represented by the Eastern Stallion Divine General Peng Shihai.

They had only one request: Execute the leftover evils of the

Tianhai government.

To assign Wang Po as a leftover evil of the Tianhai government was naturally completely unreasonable.

This was just the Chen princes and the ministers finally making their stances clear.

At the same time, several dozen letters were delivered overnight to Luoyang's Monastery of Eternal Spring.

These letters contained real blood.

All the officials of the government, military and civil, had wept blood onto their letters.

If the venerable Daoist did not come out, what would happen to the world?

.....

.....

If Chen Changsheng wanted to meet Wang Po, he probably could, but he had no such intentions.

The letters sent to Luoyang also failed to attract any of his attention.

Other than the one night he went to meet Gou Hanshi in the Orthodox Academy, he remained deep in the Li Palace, seeing no one.

Daoist Siyuan hurried back from Fenggu County while Linghai Zhiwang exhausted himself to the extreme keeping a watch on the Imperial Court and the army. Hu Thirty-Two was even busier, shedding a great deal of weight.

They stood outside the stone room, helplessly watching Chen Changsheng in the middle of his sea of swords.

Chapter 1073 – The Once More Reunited World

No matter how dangerous the situation became, Chen Changsheng remained indifferent and continued to practice the sword in the Li Palace. Xu Yourong also remained occupied with her own business within the Divine General's estate.

When the thousand swords finally returned to the Vault Sheath, Linghai Zhiwang and the other Prefects could no longer restrain themselves and entered the stone room.

Hu Thirty-Two said with a sour face, "Your Holiness, you and the Holy Maiden are endowed with the pearls of wisdom and have plans at ready, but we know nothing, so how can we coordinate?"

Chen Changsheng looked at them and sincerely said, "I really do not know what she wants to do."

Hu Thirty-Two was struck dumb by these words while Linghai Zhiwang and Daoist Siyuan appeared rather gloomy.

This answer had truly caught them by surprise. They instantly felt the pressure on their shoulders increase.

Seeing their expressions, Chen Changsheng knew that he finally had to give an explanation. Helplessly sighing, he said, "I'll go and ask."

.....

.....

It was early spring and the weather was warming, so appetite for Fortune Peace Road's stewed beef ribs was rather lacking. The stores near the entrance of the alley had already been renovated for a switch to steamed prawns. The stores that still persisted were rather empty, but perhaps because of the Yellow Paper Umbrella, no one noticed the young man and woman by the table.

A puff of steam would occasionally leak out from under the heavy lid over the boiling metal pot, from which one could imagine the pressure within.

Chen Changsheng's gaze pierced through the steam and onto Xu Yourong's beautiful face. He hesitated to speak.

Xu Yourong said, "Ask whatever you want to ask. Am I that scary?"

Chen Changsheng said, "I hear that the Old Lady of the Mutuo clan and the head of the Wu clan are both very afraid of you."

Xu Yourong ignored this comment. She turned to the owner and yelled, "Please bring a jar of Pear Blossom White."

Chen Changsheng gazed at her and said, "Gou Hanshi said that before you left for South Stream Temple, you invited the Mutuo clan's Old Lady and the head of the Wu clan to that village to play mahjong?"

Xu Yourong took a cup of hot tea and rinsed his cup and chopsticks, saying, "It's a custom of the south to do this before eating, although I don't think it does anything."

Chen Changsheng asked, "Just what happened in that mahjong game?"

Xu Yourong had failed to change the subject, so she gave him a rather bored glance and said, "We didn't even sit there for an entire hour. What could have happened?"

She had been in a rush to head to White Emperor City back then, so she truly had not had much time, but it had been enough for her to win all the chips she needed.

Chen Changsheng recalled the mahjong table in the old estate of the Wenshui Tang clan and those comments from the Tang Old Master, becoming even more interested.

Xu Yourong said, "Shuang'er managed to get a few fish from the

river's first thaw today, so I have to go back."

These words were both a prompting and warning: 'since you've finally come to ask me, please ask about the most important thing.'

Chen Changsheng said, "I originally didn't want to ask because I was afraid I would hear a bad answer."

This was one of the important reasons he had remained in the Li Palace these past few days, practicing the sword and meeting with no one.

The restaurant owner brought over a jar of Pear Blossom White wine and also removed the lid of the pot. After throwing ten-some small, snow-white bread rolls inside, he declared, "You can eat now."

Xu Yourong took up a wooden ladle and vigorously stirred the beef ribs twice, then gestured to Chen Changsheng for him to go first.

Chen Changsheng looked at the oily beef ribs and the bread rolls soaked in broth, somewhat at a loss as to where to begin.

The first time he had eaten beef ribs, he had been too excited, so he had been very focused when eating.

Now, he realized that though it was very delicious, it was also very unhealthy.

"At times, we don't need to think about things in too complicated a fashion."

Xu Yourong used a pair of long chopsticks to take up a piece of food that was five parts bone, three parts meat, and two parts tendon, and placed it in his bowl.

There were naturally two meanings behind these words.

Chen Changsheng looked at her and sincerely asked, "Is it really that simple?"

Xu Yourong seemed to be eating the meat on the ribs in a very

refined manner, but her speed was quite astonishing.

A complete and cleanly picked bone clattered onto her plate.

It was like an official concluding a case, or a storyteller beginning their story.

Xu Yourong continued her assault on the food in the pot as she casually said, "That's right, this is just to force Shang Xingzhou to return to the capital."

After a brief pause, Chen Changsheng asked, "Why?"

Xu Yourong raised her head, looked him in the eyes, and earnestly said, "Because he is not willing to meet you."

As spring warmed the air outside and the fires of the stove blazed, it became rather hot in the restaurant, but Chen Changsheng felt a comforting warmth in his body.

"Don't get angry about these things."

He said to Xu Yourong, "He's not willing to meet me perhaps because he doesn't dare to meet me."

"You said this when you were facing Eunuch Lin in the Orthodox Academy, and when you faced Shang Xingzhou later on, you said the same thing."

Xu Yourong said, "Even if this is the case, I'm still not happy."

Chen Changsheng was startled as he asked, "Why?"

Xu Yourong said, "He doesn't dare to meet you because he feels guilty, and he feels guilty because he treated you poorly, and even now, he has not thought about resolving this problem."

Yes, that Shang Xingzhou had no intention of resolving this problem was the most troublesome problem in her eyes.

After White Emperor City, although Chen Changsheng and Shang Xingzhou still treated each other as strangers, their relationship had actually improved somewhat.

Shang Xingzhou had given his tacit approval for Chen Changsheng's return to the capital and done nothing to stop him, but this was still far from enough.

He was like a massive and invisible sword hanging over Chen Changsheng's head. Whenever he was in the mood, it could drop at any time.

"If he wants to kill you, he'll kill you, and if he wants to treat you well, he'll treat you well?"

Xu Yourong raised the wine cup to her lips and drained it, her expression unchanging as she declared, "Based on what?"

Chen Changsheng looked hesitantly at the wine cup.

Although Pear Blossom White looked clear and cool, it actually had a biting taste and was extremely strong.

In the end, he still took a light sip, his eyes slightly reddening as he said, "He's still my master."

Seeing his appearance, Xu Yourong felt rather angry. "But I'm your fiancée."

Chen Changsheng looked at her in a daze, somewhat unable to connect the two sentences.

Xu Yourong took the cup from his hand and finished off the rest of the wine.

"Only one person can treat you so freely, and that's me. No one else is allowed, not Shang Xingzhou and not your senior brother."

Chen Changsheng felt that this wine was truly very fierce, or else why would just a small sip make his entire body feel so hot?

He was also worried over whether Xu Yourong's drinking so quickly might make her intoxicated. He quickly took a bread roll that had not been too soaked by the broth and placed it in her bowl, indicating that she should quickly eat.

Xu Yourong felt thoroughly uninterested, but she still lowered

her head and ate the bread roll.

As the steam rising from the pot gradually cleared up, the scenes within the restaurant became clearer and clearer. Chen Changsheng looked at her face, feeling very calm. He asked no more questions.

He didn't ask about what would happen once his master was forced to return to the capital, nor did he ask why she was so sure his master would move according to her expectations.

But everyone's eyes contained their thoughts at the moment, and the cleaner one's eyes were, the more obvious their thoughts.

Xu Yourong raised her head and looked into his eyes, and this was enough to know what he was thinking, what he was worried about.

Chapter 1074 – The Once-More-Glimpsed Light of Morning

Xu Yourong said, "If he doesn't come, the capital will inevitably fall into chaos and the Human race will enter a civil war that will be very hard to pacify."

Chen Changsheng said, "Taking wood out from the fire is his greatest skill."

"Authority over the Human race has long since ceased to have any meaning to him. What he cares about is the overarching situation."

Xu Yourong asked, "Why is it that in the Mount Song Army headquarters, in Wenshui, in South Stream Temple, and in White Emperor City, he has always retreated in the face of the Li Palace's attacks, finally becoming a man living in isolation? It isn't because of any kindness he holds toward you or some tender affection for all beings beneath the heavens. It is because he has a view on the overarching situation."

Chen Changsheng asked, "You are speaking of the northern expedition?"

Xu Yourong replied, "Yes, the only goal and significance in his life now is exterminating the demons. For this undertaking, he can sacrifice everything."

Chen Changsheng said, "But this does not include himself."

Xu Yourong agreed, "Yes, because he wants to personally see it, or perhaps it's better to say that he wants to watch on the day the great army of humanity enters Xuelao City in Emperor Taizong's place."

If a normal person were to hear this conversation, they would probably very simply regard Shang Xingzhou as a Saint while Xu Yourong and Chen Changsheng would naturally fall into the role

of villains.

But this story had never had heroes and villains. Only in the relationship between Shang Xingzhou and Chen Changsheng was there a right and wrong.

"But that day is also one that we are willing to see."

Chen Changsheng reminded Xu Yourong, "Can we really completely ignore the overarching situation?"

Xu Yourong asked, "Why can't we?"

Chen Changsheng could not understand, thinking to himself, but you aren't this sort of person.

Xu Yourong gave a charming smile. "For this matter, just treat me like a willful little girl."

Chen Changsheng found her very beautiful, at her most beautiful since the Garden of Zhou.

But he still continued to say, "Master will still not believe that you will really let the capital fall into chaos."

Xu Yourong arched her brows. "Why?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "Because he knows that I will stop you. I cannot possibly watch as the capital falls into chaos, the masses are deprived of their homes, casualties mount, and blood flows like rivers."

The restaurant had become rather quiet. The beef ribs in the pot had been stewed rotten. The gurgling sounded like the whining of a cat.

Xu Yourong faintly smiled. "The problem is, can you really stop me?"

After saying this, she stood up.

Several dozen South Stream Temple disciples, dressed in their white robes, walked into the restaurant.

Xu Yourong spread out her arms.

Two of the girls used hot towels to carefully wipe her hands.

Xu Yourong looked at Chen Changsheng and said, "When I decide to do something, no one can stop me."

Chen Changsheng asked, "Even if you're doing this for my sake?"

Xu Yourong replied, "You are only half the reason."

Chen Changsheng said, "The other half is the Divine Empress?"

Xu Yourong calmly replied, "Correct, but you cannot stop me, and not even the Empress revived could stop me from doing this."

After saying this, she walked out of the restaurant.

The old willows on the street were giving birth to new buds, enjoying the beauty of life in the warm weather.

Xu Yourong looked up to a certain part of the sky and recalled a matter Mo Yu had informed her about.

When Chen Changsheng brought his marriage contract into the capital and all the important figures who knew of this matter were concerned, the Tianhai Divine Empress had made a comment.

"If she wants to marry someone, she'll marry someone, and if she doesn't want to marry, she won't marry."

In the Tianhai Divine Empress's view, Xu Yourong would absolutely act this way, so one could understand why she had such expectations of Xu Yourong.

Xu Yourong gazed at that part of the sky and calmly thought, Empress, it's still you that most understands me.

.....

.....

Not long after Xu Yourong and the South Stream Temple disciples left, the bamboo curtain at the back of the restaurant rustled as Linghai Zhiwang and the others walked in.

Chen Changsheng looked at them and said, "All of you were listening."

Linghai Zhiwang and the others had rather strange expressions as they wondered, other than a show of affection, what else was there to hear?

Love had not been brought up in this conversation, but anyone could hear the heartfelt love and tenderness Xu Yourong felt for Chen Changsheng.

If a normal girl gave her all for her lover but ended up being told to stop by her lover, she would inevitably be very angry.

But Xu Yourong was not. She remained calm and was still even able to faintly smile. Why was this?

Chen Changsheng looked at them and earnestly said, "Because she knows that I won't stop her."

Linghai Zhiwang and the other Prefects were both shocked. If the venerable Daoist really does return to the capital, will Your Holiness really watch as the capital descends into blood and flames?

Chen Changsheng thought back to his conversation the other night with Gou Hanshi and said, "It's not that I can't stop her. I just believe that she won't do this."

Xu Yourong was not angry presumably because she believed that he would firmly believe her.

The last conversation just now had been nothing more than a play.

She only needed to slightly stimulate her spiritual sense to use the flames of the Phoenix to clean her hands. There had been no need to assume that posture.

This play was for all the living beings in the world to see, and also for Shang Xingzhou in the distant Luoyang.

Chen Changsheng walked out of the restaurant, paying no attention to the tinge of concern on Hu Thirty-Two's face.

.....

.....

The light of the morning sun illuminated the not-at-all-lofty stone pillars, casting countless slender shadows on the ground, but it was incapable of parting the spectating crowd.

The assistants of the betting houses were holding sheets of paper and yelling something while the crowds from outside the city curiously listened, with some people occasionally motivated to take some silver from their bosoms. The residents of the capital, who made up only a small part of the crowd at the moment, looked at this sight with sympathetic smiles as they thought, in the last few Grand Examinations, who else has won besides the priests of the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education and the Orthodox Academy?

The day of the Grand Examination had finally arrived. The young cultivators from all corners of the continent once more congregated in front of the Li Palace. In the brightening sun, their faces were illuminated more clearly and brimmed with vitality. However, no longer could one see a figure like that thinly-attired and lonely youth.

Even on such an important day, Pope Chen Changsheng still did not show his face, remaining in the stone room.

The crowd was astonished to see archbishops like Linghai Zhiwang and also the black-clothed girl, but they did not dare say anything.

With the clear and lingering sound of the bell, the young cultivators walked along the Divine Avenue into the Li Palace. The Grand Examination had formally begun.

.....

.....

When the entire capital was looking toward the Li Palace, a figure appeared in front of the heavy stone gate of the Mausoleum of Books.

The Orthodoxy cavalry and the Imperial Guard, who shared the responsibility for guarding the Mausoleum of Books, did not stop this person, nor did the generals and bishops who supervised them.

Because by the time they saw that person, they were already inside the Mausoleum of Books.

This person drooped their shoulders and their clothes had been washed so many times that they had lost their color. They looked rather impoverished and had a rather distressed expression.

He was not so much a scholar but more of an accountant.

In truth, he had worked in the Wenshui Tang clan as an accountant for a good deal of time.

He had also killed many demon experts on the snowy plains and ran an excellent enterprise in Scholartree Manor.

In Xunyang City, he had directly confronted the bleakest of storms. In the capital, he had slain Tie Shu with a single slash of his blade.

He had once ranked at the top of the Proclamation of Liberation and now walked amongst the Divine.

Wang Po had finally appeared.

Chapter 1075 – A Great Spectacle

The Imperial Guards outside the Mausoleum of Books instantly tensed up. With a dense twanging of bowstrings being pulled taut, countless crossbows were aimed at Wang Po's back.

Dust could be seen rising in the distance as the ground began to shake. Though it was still not possible to hear the stamping of hooves, the black-armored cavalry were probably mobilizing.

By the time these things were happening, warning signals had already been sent out to every part of the capital.

The Orthodoxy cavalry's reaction was also very fast. Even though they had received no order from the Li Palace, several hundred horsemen immediately galloped over and blockaded the gate into the Mausoleum of Books.

After three years, both sides once more engaged in a tense standoff.

Wang Po appeared unaware of what was happening outside the stone gates. He continued to make his way into the lush and green Mausoleum of Books.

Watching him leave, a Li Palace priest couldn't help but ask, "Sir, where have you been these last few days?"

Everyone in the capital wanted to know the answer.

Without turning his head, Wang Po said, "I've always been here."

Upon hearing Wang Po's answer, that priest, the Orthodoxy cavalry, and even the Imperial Guards farther out were all shocked.

No one had thought that Wang Po might have been in the Mausoleum of Books these last few days. Ordinary people could not enter the mausoleum, so they naturally would not be able to see him.

That he had appeared today before everyone was precisely because he wanted the world to know that he was going to do something.

But what exactly was he going to do?

It had been many years since Wang Po entered the Mausoleum of Books to view the monoliths and comprehend the Dao, but it seemed like he had not forgotten that experience.

Like an old hand, he found a path in the forest and began to venture southwest.

After some time, he came to a small courtyard.

The orange grove in the early spring naturally had no oranges, but there still seemed to be a faint smell of unripe oranges in the air.

Wang Po had spent the last few days living in this very courtyard.

The dried meat that had once been hung on the roof beam was nowhere to be found. The chairs and table within the room were washed so cleanly that not a speck of dust could be found.

Wang Po did not enter.

He stood outside the fence and calmly said to that old friend who had lived in that house for thirty-seven years, "I am going to walk the Divine Path today."

Back then, Xun Mei had failed in intruding upon the Divine Path. Just when Xun Mei was about to take leave of the world, Wang Po had said that, in the future, when he cultivated to the Saint Realm, he would ascend to the summit of the mausoleum to take a look around in Xun Mei's place.

It turned out that this was something he intended to do today.

.....

.....

The Grand Examination had already begun, but Chen Changsheng had still not appeared.

Even if there was no butcher, the people still had to eat pork. Even if the Pope did not appear, life still had to continue, and the examination still had to proceed.

There was no attempt to deliberately innovate in this year's Grand Examination. As they had been several years ago, the literary test, the martial test, and the one-on-one matches were conducted in order.

The literary test was conducted within the Hall of Announcements according to the old rules. It was supervised by both the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education and the Imperial Court's Ministry of Rites, but final approval rested in Gou Hanshi's hands.

Gou Hanshi was still very young, but no one questioned his qualifications. He was well-versed in the Daoist Canon, and besides, he had been the one to make the questions for this year's literary test.

In the light of the morning sun, the literary test smoothly concluded without a single incident.

The people and betting house stewards who had gathered outside the Li Palace to see the spectacle felt rather uninterested, but they also felt the air to be somewhat strange.

Following right after was the martial test, which was still the dual trials of the Dallying Forest and the Qu River. Perhaps because Chen Changsheng had ridden across the river on a crane in his Grand Examination, today's rules were even more complicated and meticulous, and any sort of tricks was essentially forbidden. However, it was not forbidden to attempt to stop one's opponents, so an occasional sword glow could be glimpsed in the sea of trees, and the danger present was even greater than the examinations from before.

It had already been three years since the Grand Examination had been conducted, so a great number of examinees had come to participate. Although the competition was much fiercer, two-hundred-some examinees still succeeded in stepping onto the opposite shore of the Qu River. Amongst them, Scholartree Manor and Star Seizer Academy had the best grades.

With none of Mount Li's Divine Kingdom's Seven Laws taking part, the young scholars of Scholartree Manor were viewed with the greatest optimism in this year's Grand Examination. Moreover, everyone knew that their principal Wang Po was in the capital, which greatly added to the daring of these scholars, and their grades were naturally amazing. That the young officer students of Star Seizer Academy were so outstanding was instead because the pressure on the capital lately had caused anger to build up in these future stars of the Great Zhou Army, and this anger was being completely converted into motivation today.

The final stage was still being held in the Hall of Washing Away Dust within the Green Leaf World.

The examinees began to file into the Hall of Pure Virtue, walking along the pattern on the ground. They then noticed the black-clothed girl with an indifferent expression.

This apathetic girl held the potted Green Leaf to her chest.

As they looked at her, the examinees began to recall those important matters their teachers had repeatedly warned them about beforehand. Their expressions flickered as they hurriedly looked away.

Only after entering the Green Leaf World and standing outside the Hall of Washing Away Dust did the examinees finally relax. Reverence and delight appeared on their faces as they set about chatting.

Even the old-fashioned youths of Scholartree Manor and the strict young officers of Star Seizer Academy could not help but

whisper amongst their schoolmates.

"Was that girl in the black dress the legendary Black Frost Dragon?"

"His Holiness the Pope is truly extraordinary. After all, it's been thousands of years since a dragon attendant appeared in the Li Palace."

"No wonder Qiushan Jun could never beat His Holiness."

"Quiet. Take care not to let that fellow from Mount Li hear you."

.....

.....

Putting aside the fact that the conversations of the examinees within the Green Leaf World were getting more and more off-track, the atmosphere outside the Li Palace was already extremely strange.

Whether it was those people who had come to see the spectacle, the peddlers, or the employees of the betting houses, they were all too quiet.

There was no spectacle, so what were all the people watching? No one was betting, so what meaning did all those betting pools have?

Everyone was looking at the Grand Examination, yet their minds were not truly on the Grand Examination, but on other matters.

Because no one believed that today's Grand Examination would proceed so calmly and smoothly.

Something big was bound to happen today, though no one knew exactly when.

Suddenly, the warning signal arrived.

Ten-some straight and thin lines flew up into the azure sky. Only experts with extremely good eyesight could tell that the lines left

behind by those blurs were red.

Ten-some Red Geese were swiftly flying through the sky. One was bound for the Imperial Palace and one for the Li Palace, but the rest were headed elsewhere.

Someone familiar with the distribution of the Great Zhou Army would be able to tell that the Red Geese were headed toward the places where the armies of the Imperial Court were garrisoned.

Linghai Zhiwang often communicated with the Imperial Court so he could naturally see this, but he cared more about where these Red Geese had come from than where they were going.

The traces left by the Red Geese had already vanished from the sky, but they still remained in his sea of consciousness.

His gaze followed those traces and ultimately fell on the southern part of the capital, and his expression turned extremely grave.

The Mausoleum of Books was over there.

Hu Thirty-Two whispered, "The chief of Gentle Stream Monastery left the Hall of Announcements just now. The four Sword Hall elders of Mount Li didn't even come today."

"The Old Lady of the Mutuo clan left the city."

Daoist Siyuan squinted and said, "If everyone goes to the Mausoleum of Books, what a spectacle that will be."

He did not conceal his ambition and fighting intent, because anyone could see that the Li Palace had to seize this opportunity.

Linghai Zhiwang turned to look at the quiet hall deep within the Li Palace, slightly confused.

Is Your Holiness still practicing the sword?

Chapter 1076 – The Man Shang Blocks the Path

There were many paths in the Mausoleum of Books, but only one path led straight to the summit: the Divine Path on the southern face, paved with white jade.

Ascending the mausoleum on the Divine Path was a matter of great significance.

Only the Emperor, the Pope, and the Holy Maiden of the south had the right to ascend the Divine Path, as this right represented supreme authority.

Before Xun Mei, many other people had attempted to intrude upon the Divine Path, but other than Zhou Dufu, not one of them succeeded.

Wang Po wanted to intrude on the Divine Path to fulfill his promise to an old friend, to challenge the Imperial Court, and to take revenge on Emperor Taizong.

Xu Yourong stood deep within the forest inside the Hundred Herb Garden, gazing at the bulge of grass as she whispered, "Empress, you once said that Daoist Ji was Emperor Taizong's most loyal minister, even a somewhat abnormally fervent follower, so will he allow such a thing to happen?"

A breeze rustled the leaves and the blades of tender grass that had recently poked their heads out of the earth. The Tianhai Divine Empress had entered her eternal sleep, so she could not answer the question.

"Whenever I think about how I have to make an enemy of such an abnormal person, I really do get nervous."

Xu Yourong had a very serene expression, with none of the nervousness that her words described. Only the tremble of her eyelashes revealed her true emotions.

What she was going to do, what she had decided, was far too frightening. The slightest lack of caution would result in the tragic death of tens of thousands of people.

To make this decision, or to make the entire continent believe that she would dare to make such a decision, required her to have an extremely formidable will.

An extremely formidable will was naturally one devoid of emotion. This was the grand and supreme Dao.

Xu Yourong's brows knit together, making her seem somewhat weak and pitiful.

No one had ever seen her like this before.

Not even in the Garden of Zhou, when she was heavily injured and on the verge of death, not even when it was someone as close to her as Chen Changsheng.

Only that smooth stone path on Sunset Valley and that tree by the cliff had ever seen her like this.

Her index fingers lightly met in the breeze.

She gazed at where they touched and said to herself, "You're capable; you can do it."

As she muttered in this delicate and timid fashion, her eyelashes gradually stopped trembling.

She raised her head to look once more at that mound in the grass, her eyes still calm.

Calm taken to its extreme was apathy.

Much less this grassy mound, not even floods that could drown the world could make her care.

"May the Sacred Light forever be with Empress."

Xu Yourong turned and left the Hundred Herb Garden.

As her dress swayed, a trail of wildflowers bloomed along her

path, and then was instantly burned to nothing by golden flames.

.....

.....

From Xun Mei's house to the base of the Divine Path was not far. It had not taken much time for Chen Changsheng, Gou Hanshi, and the rest to rush over there back then.

But Wang Po took a very long time.

At some point, his blade had left its sheath and come to rest in his hand.

If someone saw this, they would assuredly be shocked and confused.

When he fought with Tie Shu in the snow, it had taken him a very long time to take out his blade. Only at the end did he slash down with his blade and cleave the heavens and earth.

Why had he taken out his blade so early today? Who was he prepared to slash at?

Wang Po did not plan to slash at a person.

Today, the Mausoleum of Books was abnormally deserted. There were no cultivators viewing the monoliths, and even the Monolith Guardians had disappeared.

Even if there was someone here, they were not worthy of his blade.

He slashed at those branches that obstructed the road, the rotted fences, the stones of the path uneven from years of disrepair.

As his blade descended, the tree branches crumbled, the bamboo fences were crushed, the stones rendered into powder. All of this was blown away, leaving an even and new surface.

After he left, the blade marks left on the mud and stone gradually disappeared, but the blade intent concealed itself in an even deeper

space as if to hide something.

Wang Po walked to the base of the Divine Path and looked at where that pavilion used to stand.

People now knew that the Divine General Han Qing of that time had already broken into the Divine.

It was no wonder that on that night, even though Xun Mei had awoken from his dream and was at his peak, he was still not able to get past Han Qing.

Who would come now to stop him from intruding on the Divine Path?

Wang Po did not walk up the Divine Path. He quietly waited for that person to arrive.

His blade had been re-sheathed, but its energy continued to fill the world and even continued to slowly increase.

He was in no rush, because the longer he had to wait, the more energy his blade could accumulate, until it finally reached perfection and became flawless.

Perhaps for this reason, it didn't take long for the person he was waiting for to appear.

Wind stirred the clear water in those shallow canals into countless tiny ripples, creating countless complex and incomprehensible designs.

These ripples seemed to contain the wonders of the world and greatly diluted Wang Po's blade energy.

Shang Xingzhou appeared on the Divine Path, his sleeves fluttering, his black hair combed to perfection, his handsome features exuding a threatening aura.

Wang Po said, "As expected, there's absolutely nothing new."

He was not at all surprised to see Shang Xingzhou. Probably no one was.

In this present age, it was probably only Shang Xingzhou that could stop him from intruding upon the Divine Path.

Shang Xingzhou did not answer.

Compared to talking, he cared more about the practical result.

He looked at Wang Po, his eyes filled with admiration, like he was looking at a most outstanding junior.

But admiration ultimately transformed into regret.

In his plans, Wang Po would play an extremely important role in the northern expedition. He had even intended to give him the vital mission of breaking into Xuelao City.

Unfortunately, this outstanding human expert would die today.

A bout of rain descended over the Mausoleum of Books with Shang Xingzhou's arrival.

It was not a spring shower, but a rain of arrows.

Countless crossbow bolts and feathered arrows buzzed through the air in a torrential downpour.

These arrows and bolts scorched through the air, leaving behind streaks of fire and glimmering with Sacred Light.

Wang Po did not turn around. He had already sensed the rain of arrows.

He was somewhat surprised and then somewhat melancholy.

He had not expected the Imperial Guards outside the Mausoleum of Books to possess so many Sacred Light arrows.

It was obvious that the Imperial Court had anticipated his appearance at the Mausoleum of Books. Such a vast quantity of Sacred Light arrows was an extremely targeted and terrifying measure.

It seemed that three years ago, when he broke into the Divine on the Luo River, the Imperial Court had already begun preparing to

kill him.

Shang Xingzhou stood on the Divine Path, also within the scope of the rain of arrows, but he had no intention of leaving. He simply stared at Wang Po.

It was like he was looking at a corpse.

He had cultivated his Dao for more than a thousand years, so he naturally had ways of dealing with Sacred Light arrows, and he was certainly more capable than Wang Po.

And if he did not leave, Wang Po could not leave.

No matter how powerful Wang Po's blade was, it could not block both him and the rain of arrows at the same time.

At this moment, a sword glow suddenly rose from a forest in the southwest region of the Mausoleum of Books.

It was an extremely plain and clean sword glow.

A bird took flight in alarm, but before it could leave its branch, it was cut down by another sword glow.

This was an extremely resplendent sword glow.

More and more sword glows began to rise from the forest.

Chapter 1077 – After That

When the plain and clean sword glow rose from the forest in the southwest region of the Mausoleum of Books, Shang Xingzhou's right hand that had been hanging at his side moved.

He was prepared to grip his sword.

Wang Po's reaction was faster and more straightforward.

He gripped the hilt of his blade.

Shang Xingzhou was now in the same situation as Wang Po. If he moved, he would have to face those sword glows and Wang Po at the same time.

Just a moment ago, it was he that made it so that Wang Po could not move. The situation had now been reversed.

The sword glows continued to increase in number, densely filling the sky as they rose from various parts of the Mausoleum of Books.

The sword glows flying through the sky were dulled by the light of the sun, but their sword intents became more distinct. They formed flickering lines that wove together into a tight net.

The entirety of the rain of Sacred Light arrows crashed into the net of swords.

In a dense and ear-grating clattering, grinding, and hacking, the arrows began to splinter and break.

There were far more arrows than sword glows in the Mausoleum of Books.

But the sword glows also carried Sacred Light, and it was purer and thicker than the Sacred Light attached to the arrows.

As the arrows broke, milky white rays of light began to shine, illuminating the south face of the Mausoleum of Books with startling clarity.

The several hundred sword glows gradually faded, returning to the ground.

The arrows in the sky had all been sliced to pieces that were now drifting down like catkins, blown willy-nilly by the wind.

White dresses were also fluttering in the wind.

Several hundred disciples of South Stream Temple began to emerge from the forest, from the sides of the stone paths, by the shallow canals.

It was like several hundred white flowers had suddenly bloomed on the mountainside of the Mausoleum of Books.

The disciples of South Stream Temple had been in the Mausoleum of Books this entire time.

They had used some unknown method to bypass the surveillance of the Imperial Court, and even the priests of the Li Palace.

Of course, not even this green mountain could hide their sword intents from Shang Xingzhou's eyes.

But Wang Po had used the Dao of his blade to successfully obstruct Shang Xingzhou's gaze.

At this beautiful, even magnificent sight, Shang Xingzhou thought of a phrase, causing him to glance at Wang Po.

After several hundred years, the Human race welcomed another generation of blooming wildflowers.

Wang Po's appearance had heralded the start of this generation.

.....

.....

In the southern region of the Mausoleum of Books, white dresses swayed.

The sword array had been formed, Shang Xingzhou held within.

All the disciples of South Stream Temple had appeared here.

This was without question the strongest form of the South Stream Temple sword array in the last one thousand years.

Not even the sword array that Zhou Dufu had encountered when he was forcing his way into Holy Maiden Peak exceeded it.

Shang Xingzhou was on the Divine Path, not deep within the sword array. Moreover, an array had to have a gate of life.

Logically speaking, he should have been escaping at his fastest speed right now, but he did not.

Because he knew that since the architect of this plan had put all their mind into it, they would definitely not have left a gap.

Xu Yourong appeared on the Divine Path, standing at a higher place than Shang Xingzhou.

She was dressed in white robes. Her expression was calm and her face beautiful.

If Shang Xingzhou wanted to break out of the South Stream Temple sword array, this was the only path.

Just a moment ago, it was Wang Po that was prepared to intrude upon the Divine Path and Shang Xingzhou that wanted to stop him.

Now, it was Shang Xingzhou who had to intrude upon the Divine Path.

Attacker and defender had instantly been reversed.

.....

.....

In the current situation, it seemed like Shang Xingzhou was contending against an army alone.

But he said nothing and Xu Yourong said nothing, because both of them knew that just as the positions of attacker and defender could be reversed at any moment, so could the numbers on both

sides.

It had nothing to do with whether one was in the right or in the wrong. It was just a matter of cold and uninteresting numbers.

Dust rose from outside the Mausoleum of Books. The Orthodoxy cavalry and the Imperial Guards were in a stalemate while two divisions of terrifying black-armored cavalry were rushing over.

Many of the army's and ministries' experts had already infiltrated the Mausoleum of Books.

A flock of birds would occasionally rise from the trees in alarm, crying out in fear as they flew into the distance.

The places where no alarmed birds could be seen and where no activity could be observed were actually even more dangerous.

The assassins of the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets and the blue-clothed Daoists of the Monastery of Eternal Spring were probably in the forests there.

.....

.....

Flying carriages were extremely difficult to make and similarly expensive. They were also very slow, so they had always been regarded as flashy and useless.

In the entire continent, only the capital and Xuelao City had them. Many people believed that this was just the humans and demons flaunting their capabilities, treating flying carriages like decorations.

But the Prince of Xiang had chosen to take a flying carriage to the Mausoleum of Books today.

It naturally wasn't because he was concerned that the streets of the capital were packed with troops, and it also wasn't because he was in a hurry.

He didn't have a mount like a Red Cloud Qilin, but it was

completely within his capabilities to fly over.

He had chosen a flying carriage precisely because they were slow.

He sat within the carriage, his two hands on his plump belly as he incessantly sighed.

Flying carriages... time... why can't you be just a little slower?

.....

.....

The princes of the Chen clan had never been ones to just sit back to drink and eat all day. They were superb horsemen, and many of the princes had already traveled from their homes to the Mausoleum of Books.

They were not surprised to discover that Prince Chen Liu was not present, but when they saw that flying carriage in the sky, they couldn't help but frown.

The Prince of Zhongshan had arrived much earlier. He stood by a river bank some distance away and gazed at the Mausoleum of Books with chilly eyes. It was impossible to tell what he was thinking.

The Old Lady of the Mutuo clan and the head of the Wu clan had also arrived, though they were standing on the south side. Just like the Prince of Zhongshan, they were also standing on a river bank.

All three were people who knew many secrets but still did not have a complete understanding of the situation, so they had the subconscious desire to stand a little farther.

Other than those attending the Grand Examination, all the experts of the south had come to the Mausoleum of Books.

Three tall and thin men stood at the very front, their bodies dressed in hempen clothes and covered in sword intent.

They were from Mount Li and were elders of the Sword Hall. Killing was their area of expertise.

The Eastern Stallion Divine General stood in front of his troops, looking at those three Sword Hall elders with a rather gloomy expression.

He had once worked together with these three elders in the snowy plains of the north. He knew how formidable they were and would naturally not underestimate them.

"Once the army arrives, gather up all the array masters. Be sure to kill these three people at the first moment."

At these words, the Xiaoling Divine General was quiet for a few moments, then he asked, "How many array masters will die that way?"

The Eastern Stallion Divine General harshly said, "It's worth it, or else we'll all die to the swords of those three."

.....

.....

Shang Xingzhou calmly gazed at Xu Yourong. He was not angry for having fallen into a trap, nor was he nervous. No negative emotions could be seen. On the contrary, he seemed very interested in all this.

He had worked together with her in White Emperor City. At the time, he had greatly admired her talent, intelligence, and resolve.

As her elder, he even felt that Chen Changsheng could not match up to her, even though Chen Changsheng was his disciple.

Today, he admired her even more.

The experts of the noble clans and sects outside the Mausoleum of Books, and even Wang Po, were all her chess pieces, and they were willing to be her chess pieces. This was a most extraordinary feat.

She had gathered this momentum to compel him to return to the capital and pushed the situation to this point. Her tempo was as

clear and well-defined as a horse stamping through ice and snow. The entire plan had been extremely beautiful.

The question was, what did she plan to do next?

"Several decades ago, Emperor Xian's illness worsened and Tianhai went back on her word, unwilling to hand over the throne. From that moment on, whenever I set forth on a great undertaking, I would always ask myself, 'After that?' Only by directly asking one's Dao heart can one get the true answer and know what oneself is truly thinking. If I had thought those two words back then, perhaps I would not have met her in the Hundred Herb Garden, and so there would naturally be no need for what happened later on. Now, it is your turn to answer this question. You wanted me to come back to the capital. I came back, so now... what happens after that?"

Shang Xingzhou's voice was very calm and flat.

Xu Yourong's voice was also very calm. "If you are not willing to agree to my request, there will be no 'after'."

Chapter 1078 – Held

Xu Yourong's reply was very fast, as if she had not even needed to think about it.

But both Shang Xingzhou and Wang Po knew that this was because she had already thought of this question far too many times. No further thought was needed.

Wang Po gazed at the dust cloud getting closer and closer to the Mausoleum of Books and sighed.

Shang Xingzhou looked at her and said, " Why must I agree to your request?"

Xu Yourong replied, "'Request' is just a polite way of saying it, because I must respect you as Chen Changsheng's master. In truth, I require this of you."

'Request' and 'require' were only a few letters off, but the wills they represented were vastly different.

There was already no one left who dared to treat Shang Xingzhou with such an unflinching stance.

"Why?"

"Because you want to make an expedition to the north, to exterminate the demons, to unite the world under the Human race."

They were some of the most intelligent people in the world, so they did not need to explain too much. Their questions and answers were the truths that came from the depths of their Dao hearts.

Given the array of forces outside the Mausoleum of Books, if a battle really did begin, no matter who won, both sides would suffer grievous casualties. The aftereffects would linger for many years, and the confluence of the north and south would vanish like

bubbles. Humanity would descend into civil war and for the next several decades, there would be no chance to defeat the demons and unite the continent.

Shang Xingzhou might even be dead in several decades.

He would not allow such a thing to happen.

"I do not like Tianhai and I also don't like Su Li, because no matter how far they looked, they were still only willing to look at the place they stood on."

Shang Xingzhou indifferently said to Xu Yourong, "I did not expect the Holy Maiden to also be this sort of person."

Xu Yourong remained unmoved. "If one cannot even stand firmly on the ground beneath one's feet, what meaning is there in looking farther?"

Shang Xingzhou replied, "If one does not look far, one is liable to regard oneself too highly. Do you believe that you alone are enough to make the world fall into chaos?"

Xu Yourong answered, "Once a person has many opinions, it becomes easy for their mind to fall into disorder. If the hearts of the people are in disorder, how can the world not fall into disorder?"

She spoke here of the Prince of Xiang and Prince Chen Liu, of the Divine Generals taught by Chen Guansong, of the ministers of the Imperial Court and the elders of the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education, of every person that lived on this world and had his own opinions and ambitions on the world, and included Shang Xingzhou and herself.

"As long as I am here, the world will not fall into disorder."

Shang Xingzhou's expression was very serene, yet it gave an extremely convincing confidence.

Xu Yourong calmly returned, "People will die eventually, and Sir

is not an exception."

Shang Xingzhou looked at the South Stream Temple disciples and Wang Po, and asked, "You think that you can kill me today?"

Xu Yourong replied, "At the start, I believed that I could kill you, because I knew that your injuries have still not healed."

Shang Xingzhou's eyes became deep and profound. He did not think that she would be able to see this.

On that night in the Mausoleum of Books, the Tianhai Divine Empress had used her body, soul, and Dao to fight against three supreme experts in a heaven-shaking battle.

Xu Yourong had not personally seen this battle, but in the following three years, she had performed many calculations.

She realized that the Pope on that night had not attacked with all his power. At the same time, she confirmed that the Divine Empress's most powerful attacks had basically been focused within Luoyang.

Shang Xingzhou's injuries lingered on from that day, and then they relapsed in White Emperor City.

But from the Divine Empress's choices that night, one could see that she put the highest priority on Shang Xingzhou.

Xu Yourong would not doubt the Tianhai Divine Empress's gaze.

She began to re-examine her initial plan and then made an extremely important alteration.

"You are stronger than the world imagines. It truly is very difficult for me to kill you."

Xu Yourong gave a faint smile. "But I can hold you."

A sudden gale whisked away the dust on the Divine Path.

Two wings of pure white, ten-some zhang in length, unfurled behind her back.

Several hundred small white flowers once more bloomed on the mountainside as the South Stream Temple disciples came from their various locations to the base of the Divine Path.

In the entire process, their positions and the connections between them remained in order, extremely tight and flawless.

If one looked down from the peak of the Mausoleum of Books, they might think about time being reversed on a broken flower pot, causing it to come together again.

'I can hold you.'

It sounded like something ordinary, but actually doing it was not so simple.

Holding a supreme expert was not necessarily as easy as killing one.

Shang Xingzhou had a pure and wondrous Dao, and was able to travel a hundred li on a gust of wind. Even in the sealed area of the Mausoleum of Books, he could retreat unimpeded.

Not even the Tianhai Divine Empress would have been able to say such words to Shang Xingzhou.

In the entire world, only Holy Maiden Peak could have such confidence, because they had the South Stream Temple sword array.

In Zhou Dufu's prime, he had still been held by the South Stream Temple sword array for some time.

If Xu Yourong only wanted to hold Shang Xingzhou in the sword array for some time, she could probably do it.

But what was her goal in keeping Shang Xingzhou here?

Shang Xingzhou had come because of Wang Po.

If he were held by the South Stream Temple sword array, Wang Po naturally could leave.

Where would Wang Po go?

Shang Xingzhou looked at Wang Po.

Wang Po explained, "My mission was to draw you here."

Shang Xingzhou asked, "You can leave?"

Wang Po looked to the end of the Divine Path and said, "The Mausoleum of Books will always be here. If I want to come, I can do so whenever I please."

Shang Xingzhou's eyes chilled. "You believe that you can leave?"

These were two similar questions, but they had different meanings.

The former asked about willingness while the latter spoke of ability.

Wang Po perked his brows at Shang Xingzhou's question.

His eyes and brows were rather close, like an overcast sky hanging low over the earth of a flat plain.

As he raised his brows, a massive tree suddenly appeared between the sky and the plain, its trunk extremely straight.

"I do not like using the many to oppress the few, so I choose to leave. Otherwise, you can try to have me stay."

After saying this, he took his hand off the hilt of his blade, the person himself ready to leave.

Xu Yourong said to him, "Thank you."

Wang Po recalled Xun Mei's final words to him outside the Mausoleum of Books and shook his head.

As he walked back along the same path, passing through the forest, he took a glance at that little house behind the fence before leaving the mausoleum.

There was probably no small number of military experts, assassins from the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets, and Daoists from

the Monastery of Eternal Spring hiding in the forest and buildings.

His hand did not grip the hilt of his blade again, because none of these people were worth unsheathing his blade for, and they also did not have the courage to show themselves.

When he stepped out of the heavy stone gate of the Mausoleum of Books, he stopped.

The princes of the Chen clan and a mass of cavalry stood across from him.

A bishop came up to him and whispered a few words to which Wang Po shook his head.

The bishop was somewhat hesitant, but he ultimately did not dare to defy Wang Po's will. He ordered the Orthodoxy cavalry blocking the gate to retreat along the river bank.

The crowd across from them grew a little restless at this sight, though it quickly fell silent, because everyone recognized who that seemingly impoverished scholar was.

The Mausoleum of Books was absolutely silent, the air beginning to press down, fraught with tension. Even the landing of the flying carriage was not able to change the mood.

The Prince of Xiang was helped out of the carriage by two of his brothers. He was a little sleepy, so it was only after rubbing his eyes that he realized that Wang Po was standing there.

He asked in surprise, "What do you mean by this?"

Chapter 1079 – The First Person to Kill

A rapidly flowing river surrounded the Mausoleum of Books, just like the moat around Luoyang.

The flat and treeless ground between the two factions was actually a bridge across this river, though the breadth and thickness of the bridge meant few people realized this.

A seal that had existed since ancient times made it incredibly difficult for people to fly in and around the Mausoleum of Books.

Wang Po, by standing there, seemed to be saying, 'With one man standing at this pass alone, ten thousand men cannot pass.'

The problem was that many experts, assassins, and Daoists had already entered the Mausoleum of Books.

What did he want to do by standing there?

Wang Po explained, "If they do not reach an agreement, I will strike."

Yes, this was the answer.

He stood here not to guard the Mausoleum of Books, but so that he could launch an attack at his opponent at any time.

The faces of the princes flickered at these words while the Prince of Zhongshan's eyes turned even gloomier.

The Prince of Xiang said with a bitter face, "The Holy Maiden wants to take revenge for Imperial Mother. Do you really intend to go crazy with her?"

Wang Po appeared rather surprised. He had not expected the Prince of Xiang to still refer to the Tianhai Divine Empress as 'Imperial Mother'.

The Prince of Xiang knew what he was thinking and explained, "Imperial Mother was not my mother by birth, but I am still her son. I entered the capital with the venerable Daoist because I

believed that her esteemed self had committed an error, not because I personally had a grudge against her. It was just like how I promised Zhu Luo that you would not be allowed to live, but have I done anything to you in the last few years? It's all for the overarching situation."

These words were spoken with such sincerity that even those brothers of his who knew exactly what he was up to almost believed him.

Wang Po laughed but said nothing.

Seeing his response, a county prince couldn't help but scold, "What are you being so arrogant for! I'll have you die here today!"

Many troops of the Imperial Court had been gathered here, as had many experts, and with the Divine Domain expert that was the Prince of Xiang, this was a force that was reasonably capable of killing Wang Po.

The problem was that battles were always the most complicated of activities. Even a battle against one person was anything but simple.

Let alone the constantly shifting situation of an actual battle, even the moment the battle would begin had still not been decided.

The Prince of Xiang said, "You should know that there's no way a fight will start today. There's no need to put on this appearance."

These words seemed rather incomprehensible, but Wang Po understood. He smirked and asked, "Then what are you doing here?"

The Prince of Xiang sighed. "One has to contribute a little thought."

Wang Po asked, "What sort of thoughts?"

"Ambition, of course."

The Prince of Xiang grinned. "If the venerable Daoist does not

doubt His Majesty, nothing will happen, and it naturally won't be our affair. If he does have doubts, I have to make some preparations."

Wang Po said, "Your Highness is quite frank."

The Prince of Xiang was just prepared to continue speaking when several dozen bright sword cries came from within the Mausoleum of Books.

Everyone looked over, their expressions turning serious.

Just like the Prince of Xiang had said, the current situation seemed tense, but there was a fundamental difference between it and the situation from three years ago. The two sides would not necessarily begin to fight.

If this really was the case, why had those sword cries arisen?

.....

.....

Shang Xingzhou stood on the Divine Path.

Xu Yourong stood higher.

Shang Xingzhou took one step forward.

The South Stream Temple sword array instinctively responded, silently beginning to work.

Countless streams of light appeared in the sky, tracing all sorts of unfathomable and indescribable orbits in the air.

Several dozen sword cries rose.

These sword cries did not originate from swords rubbing against the air. Instead, they came from sword intents compressing and then releasing the air.

It was clear and soft, but also incredibly deep.

It was like a clear stream dropping down from a cliff, flowing into an extremely deep mountain stream.

Several dozen sword glows circled around Shang Xingzhou's body.

Shang Xingzhou extended a finger that exuded a soft light.

Steel tempered a hundred times could become an object so flexible that it could wind around one's finger.

The several dozen sword glows went from straight to slightly bent. Although they did not scatter, an extremely small space opened up between them.

Shang Xingzhou's left foot landed.

The sword cries ceased and the sword glows receded.

A chilly spring wind swept away the dust on the Divine Path.

It was like nothing had happened.

But Shang Xingzhou had climbed up one step.

He lowered his head to look at his Daoist robe.

A tear had appeared on the lower hem.

The might of the South Stream Temple sword array had somewhat exceeded his calculations.

Xu Yourong was also rather surprised. According to her calculations, the cut should have been a little deeper.

The first strike of the South Stream Temple sword array was not even able to cut off a corner of his clothes?

The battle did not begin here. This had just been a probe.

The final result had left both sides greatly dissatisfied, so they decided to give up on direct confrontation.

Shang Xingzhou said, "I am very curious as to how you managed to persuade Wang Po."

Xu Yourong replied, "I guaranteed to him that my method would result in the least amount of people dying. He guaranteed to me

that no matter what I did today, he would support me."

Shang Xingzhou noted, "It seems that you have a deep understanding of his path of the blade."

Xu Yourong said, "I understand that fellow more."

The fellow she referred to was naturally Chen Changsheng.

He took Wang Po as a model. Even after learning the Halving Blade Style, he still conducted himself according to Wang Po's path of the blade.

Xu Yourong understood Chen Changsheng, so she naturally understood how to gain the trust of someone like Wang Po.

Shang Xingzhou calmly said, "Do you think that you also have a deep understanding of me?"

Xu Yourong said, "For three years, I have always been attempting to understand you."

Shang Xingzhou had to admit that she had prepared for her job very well.

Today's situation, the method by which she threatened, would not have succeeded with anyone else. It was only useful against him.

She knew what he cared about the most. More importantly, she had the ability to destroy them.

Shang Xingzhou said, "At most, you can only delay me for an hour."

This was the conclusion he had obtained from climbing one step.

Xu Yourong said, "One hour is enough."

Shang Xingzhou shook his head. "This is the capital, not Wenshui."

He was referring here to the events that had taken place several months ago in the Wenshui Tang clan. Tang Thirty-Six had only

needed two hours to find evidence incriminating the Tang Second Master and take care of the Tang Second Branch's power, but this was because he had the Tang Old Master's tacit consent and the difference in strength between the two sides was so great that there was no hope of resistance.

But this place was the capital, and the Imperial Court still held the upper hand in terms of power. If the two sides broke into hostilities, a true battle would assuredly occur.

Xu Yourong said, "I have already made preparations."

Shang Xingzhou faintly smiled and asked, "How do you plan to fight this battle?"

Xu Yourong said, "First, I will kill Prince Chen Liu."

This was an unexpected answer.

She did not choose to first take control of the Imperial Palace, nor did she choose to attack the ministries. Instead, she had chosen the most straightforward of methods: killing someone.

Moreover, she did not want to kill the Prince of Xiang who was right outside the Mausoleum of Books, nor did she want to kill the Prince of Zhongshan, who wielded great authority in the military. Nor did she want to kill the Divine Generals who held the actual reins of power. Instead, she wanted to kill Prince Chen Liu.

Although Prince Chen Liu was by no means lacking in reputation, his strength was not too remarkable, and the power and influence he possessed were also not in vitally important areas.

Why had Xu Yourong chosen him?

Why was it that when Shang Xingzhou heard her choice, his eyes turned deep and profound?

Chapter 1080 – Blind Chess

Shang Xingzhou asked, "Why is it him?"

Xu Yourong answered, "Because he will be the new sovereign."

This battle had been triggered by the alliance between her and Yuren. If Shang Xingzhou was the one to win at the end, the emperor would have to be changed.

Prince Chen Liu was the best candidate, and he was the one that Shang Xingzhou had already chosen.

Shang Xingzhou did not deny this. He calmly said, "Correct, he is the best amongst all the rest of Emperor Taizong's descendants, although he is inferior to His Majesty."

Xu Yourong asked, "I wish to know, are you really willing to give up on His Majesty, even though you spent twenty-some years pouring your heart and soul into raising him?"

Shang Xingzhou was quiet for a while, then he said, "If His Majesty truly was convinced by you, then I must give him up."

Xu Yourong asked, "Did you ever think that my visit to the palace last night might have been a feint?"

Shang Xingzhou replied, "His Majesty did not write a letter to Luoyang."

Many days had already passed, enough to write a very sincere letter.

But he had not received one.

Xu Yourong understood his meaning.

This was precisely the result she had wanted to see.

Thus, Prince Chen Liu had to die.

If he died, then even if Shang Xingzhou did win this battle, who would become emperor?

Those ambitious princes of the Chen clan would naturally drag the entire Human race into chaos.

What meaning would there be in Shang Xingzhou's continuing to fight this battle?

It was clearly early spring, but the wind was chilly and seemed devoid of warmth.

The Mausoleum of Books was covered in green trees, but the bushes lining the Divine Path were covered in dust and appeared listless.

Shang Xingzhou looked beyond the Mausoleum of Books, inspecting the several plumes of dust in the distance. He knew that the black-armored cavalry were still an hour away, but his expression remained easygoing.

"He is an outstanding youth. It's not easy to kill him."

"I've known him since I was little. I know that he's extremely cautious and always leaves a path of retreat whenever he does anything."

"Yes, the aspect in which he is still far inferior to Emperor Taizong is that at several crucial moments, he lacks the courage to directly face blood."

Shang Xingzhou turned to Xu Yourong and said, "And you have found his escape path?"

Xu Yourong softly confirmed, "Correct."

A gentle wind blew through the streets. Those buildings burdened by the dust of history had learned long ago how to remain unmoved by so-called major events.

The princely estates along the Road of Peace were extremely quiet, perhaps because their masters had all gone to the Mausoleum of Books.

Prince Chen Liu had not. He remained, sitting in the reception

hall of the estate and quietly sipping tea.

Glimpses of the experts of the princely estate could be seen outside the window.

The tea in his porcelain bowl gradually cooled, just like the fingers he used to hold the bowl.

He gently placed the tea bowl back on the table and subtly glanced at the base of the window.

The ground there was paved with gray bricks, one of them a little glossier than the rest.

His path of retreat was not the rear gate. On the contrary, in times like these, the rear gate was often the most dangerous location.

The path of retreat that Prince Chen Liu had arranged for himself was right beneath that brick, a tunnel that led to a canal of the Luo River.

Starting from the previous dynasty, the Road of Peace had been the residence of the powerful nobility. Those nobles, lusting for power and fearful of surprises, had dug out countless tunnels.

After Zhou Tong took power over the Department for Purging Officials, he had dug out even more tunnels.

Those tunnels were as dense as a spider web. Other than himself, no one could understand them.

.....

.....

"There's also Mo Yu."

Shang Xingzhou said to Xu Yourong, "So-called paths of retreat truly are liable to become dead ends."

Xu Yourong replied, "Yes, so Prince Chen Liu will die."

.....

.....

Three years ago, when the capital was shrouded in snow, Chen Changsheng killed his way into the alley of the Northern Military Department and Zhou Tong fled into the prison underground.

While he was speaking with Xue He, he was poisoned by Zhexiu.

With great difficulty, he managed to escape through the tunnels to his external residence on the Road of Peace, but he was unable to throw off Zhexiu's pursuit.

But what truly made him despair was that beautiful palace maiden who had been waiting in his external residence the entire time.

Mo Yu knew everything about him, whether it was the external residence on the Road of Peace or the extremely complicated network of tunnels.

Today, people were also waiting at the end of that tunnel for Prince Chen Liu.

Two Daoist nuns were waiting for him.

If one went under the fake mountain in the Prince of Louyang's estate, they would find a tunnel that turned west.

The tunnel that led from the Prince of Xiang's estate to the canal of the Luo River intersected with this tunnel.

Two Daoist nuns sat cross-legged at this intersection.

One nun had a serene expression and appeared rather delicate.

The other had steely brows raised in anger while thunderbolts raged in her eyes.

It was the two most senior and most powerful martial grandaunts of South Stream Temple, Huai Ren and Huai Shu.

.....

.....

"I've always wanted to know why you had Huai Ren and Huai Shu enter the capital..."

Shang Xingzhou looked at Xu Yourong and said, "It turned out to be in this place."

Xu Yourong realized that she had not been able to hide the arrival of her two martial aunts from Shang Xingzhou. She said, "Since he is the first to be killed, the preparations must not be lacking."

Shang Xingzhou shook his head. "In my view, this assassination cannot succeed."

.....

.....

"Please, have some tea."

Prince Chen Liu took up the tea pot, poured four cups of tea, and lightly pushed them forward. His manners were impeccable.

The tea in his bowl was cold, but the tea in the cups had to be hot, because this symbolized respect.

Four Daoists in blue sat across from him, their eyes reserved and their appearances ordinary. However, the occasional flap of their sleeves would be accompanied by the sudden appearance of sword intent. They were clearly of unusual cultivation level.

This was especially the case for the white-haired old Daoist. He appeared rather wooden and taciturn, but he gave off an aura of unfathomable strength.

Only a few people were aware that while Shang Xingzhou was in the capital's Orthodox Academy and then hiding in Xining, Luoyang's Monastery of Eternal Spring was under the management of this old Daoist.

Prince Chen Liu had only learned of this fact today. At the same time, he learned that the venerable Daoist's followers were far stronger than he had imagined.

With this old Daoist half a step from the Divine, the three other Daoists from the Monastery of Eternal Spring, and the many experts of the princely estate at his side, he suddenly felt like he had been too cautious.

Of course, if something unforeseen happened in the Mausoleum of Books and the other side really did end up with the advantage, he would still have to leave.

Prince Chen Liu's gaze once more fell on that gray brick under the window.

.....

.....

"You placed your strongest person at Prince Chen Liu's side. It looks like you really do value him."

Shang Xingzhou said nothing, but Xu Yourong understood his intentions. She indifferently added, "Then his death is even more imperative."

Shang Xingzhou slightly raised his brows in surprise, because Xu Yourong's expression remained serene, not changing in the slightest.

She was not feigning calm. With the chess game at this point, there was no meaning or need to conceal one's emotions.

Xu Yourong was truly very calm.

Because she was extremely sure that Prince Chen Liu would die today.

.....

.....

The Prince of Xiang's estate was very quiet. The impassive experts watched their surroundings, occasionally adjusting their positions, their feet making no noise.

In the garden behind the reception hall, two array masters were paying close attention to a sand table, prepared to adjust the defenses at any time.

A man dressed in blue stood at the base of the wall, his shoulders drooped and his eyes half-closed in apparent sleep.

It was a very ordinary man, and the sword loosely tied to his waist was also ordinary.

But those who knew this man knew that this sword was tied so loosely to make it easier to unsheathe. The man drooped his shoulders for the same reason.

The former was his habit ever since he had started his career, while the latter was something he had learned after meeting Wang Po in Xunyang City.

From his posture to his breathing to his clothes, every detail was to make it easier for him to unsheathe his sword.

Thus, in the entire world, he was the one that could strike the fastest with the sword.

Chapter 1081 – Please Do Not Repeat the Story from That Night

"I forgot that there was also Liu Qing."

Shang Xingzhou sighed, "If you hadn't mentioned him, I wouldn't have even been able to think of his name."

Even though he was now the de facto number one individual in the world, not even he would underestimate an assassin as frightening as Liu Qing.

So when he said that he hadn't thought about him, he truly had not thought about him. In no way was he expressing contempt or disregard.

Xu Yourong said, "He truly is easily forgotten."

"The best assassin should be as such."

Shang Xingzhou said in a voice tinged with admiration, "He advanced a lot after Su Li and that one left."

Xu Yourong knew that the other person he spoke of was not her teacher, but the legendary leader of the assassins. She said, "Yes, so I am sure that Prince Chen Liu will die."

After a moment of silence, Shang Xingzhou said, "I can presume that you have similar plans in many other places?"

Xu Yourong replied, "The plans elsewhere are much cruder. The newly appointed Archbishop of the Hall of Illustrious Persons, Guan Bai, will return to the Heavenly Dao Academy in a short while, but I am not sure what will happen after that."

Shang Xingzhou nodded. "Zhuang Zhihuan is rather dissatisfied with this matter. If the situation turns restless, he might strike Guan Bai."

Xu Yourong answered, "I've also thought of this, in which case

Guan Bai will die."

She was clearly stating that an important member of her side would die, but she still had a serene expression. It was like she was describing something that had nothing to do with her.

Shang Xingzhou calmly looked at her and then suddenly began to laugh.

Only now did he truly begin to regard her as his opponent.

"And after that death?"

"Various kinds of death."

"How will they die?"

"It's just you killing me, me killing you... just like that night."

The expression in Xu Yourong's eyes turned faint, as if she was gazing at a distant place or time.

On that night three years, she and Mo Yu had been sent out of the capital by the Divine Empress, so they had not been able to see it.

.....

.....

Ten-some Red Geese flew into the sky. Some of them landed while others headed for farther destinations.

The news about the events taking place in the Mausoleum of Books spread through the streets of the capital. The approaching plumes of dust crossing the plains were further proof of this news.

The crowd outside the Li Palace became restless and quickly dispersed, but the Grand Examination continued.

The bishops and deacons rushed to and fro between the halls, even more of them rushing across the Divine Avenue. The Orthodoxy cavalry had already been deployed. A somber mood suffused the air.

Linghai Zhiwang looked at Chen Changsheng and solemnly said,

"It's about to start."

Chen Changsheng walked to the entrance of the hall and said, "If..."

Linghai Zhiwang, Hu Thirty-Two, and Daoist Siyuan nervously looked over.

Chen Changsheng had not paid attention to matters of the outside world for many days now. If he had a silent understanding with Xu Yourong or had prepared some trump card, it had to be revealed today.

"...I'm just saying 'if'."

Chen Changsheng fell quiet again, then he turned and said to them, "Forget it. There's no 'if'. Follow the instructions on the paper."

After saying this, he took out a paper dragonfly and passed it to them.

Linghai Zhiwang and the others unfolded the paper dragonfly and hurriedly glanced over it. They were instantly struck dumb.

Whatever absurd orders Chen Changsheng had given them, they still had to carry them out.

.....

.....

The clear water within the stone pool seeped over the edges and silently flowed down the path of stone and out of the hall.

Only when the water was agitated would it let out a sound similar to the clear cry of a sword.

Chen Changsheng ladled some water.

The Green Leaf was not present, so the water was naturally not for it.

He raised the ladle to his mouth and slowly drank.

Tang Thirty-Six stared into his eyes and asked, "Just what are you planning to do?"

Chen Changsheng used his sleeve to wipe water off his face and said, "Drinking clear water can clear up the heart."

Tang Thirty-Six gravely said, "You've never drunk unboiled water, much less used your sleeve to wipe your mouth."

Chen Changsheng looked at him and asked, "Have you not noticed that I've already changed a lot?"

Tang Thirty-Six inquired, "Where have you changed?"

Chen Changsheng earnestly replied, "I live more freely and casually."

Tang Thirty-Six looked into his bright eyes and examined his earnest expression, and rage poured out of every pore of his body as he huffed, "You should look in a mirror."

Chen Changsheng clearly did not understand what he meant and appeared rather puzzled.

Tang Thirty-Six listened to the activity outside and frowned. "Are you really not worried?"

Chen Changsheng shook his head. "Since they aren't going to fight, why should I worry?"

Confused, Tang Thirty-Six asked, "What do you mean?"

Chen Changsheng turned toward the stone room. For some reason, he had a rather complicated expression.

"I understand my master more than Yourong. Until he is prepared, he definitely won't allow the other side any chance to start the battle."

The two sides had already settled into a deadlock in the Mausoleum of Books, so Tang Thirty-Six found it impossible to believe Chen Changsheng's conclusion. He treated it as Chen Changsheng simply soothing himself.

Chen Changsheng had passed the paper dragonfly to Linghai Zhiwang and the others, but he would not be present.

"We're really not using the Imperial Design?"

He stared into Chen Changsheng's eyes, his face unprecedentedly solemn.

Chen Changsheng said nothing.

Tang Thirty-Six said, "If you're sure that His Majesty will stand on your side at the most critical moment, today is the best chance."

The Lingyan Pavilion had already been destroyed by the Tianhai Divine Empress using the Frost God Spear, but the array pivot for the Imperial Design was still within the Imperial Palace. Moreover, though the Tang Old Master was maintaining his neutral stance, the Tang clan's chief branch, free and unhindered, was gradually regaining its power. His father had sent many enforcers into the capital, stationed at various stores and merchant associations, and ready to move at Tang Thirty-Six's word.

With the Tang clan's help, Yuren could activate the Imperial Design at any moment.

At that time, even if the princes led the armies into the capital, they would be no match for the martial brothers.

This was not the first time Tang Thirty-Six had brought up this suggestion.

Chen Changsheng remained silent.

Tang Thirty-Six finally understood that he was not hesitating, but using his silence to voice his opinion.

Chen Changsheng trusted that if he truly was standing before the abyss, his senior brother would protect him.

But for various reasons, he did not want to use the Imperial Design.

Tang Thirty-Six stared into his eyes and asked, "Why?"

"If we use the Imperial Design, it will be too similar to that night from three years ago."

Chen Changsheng paused for a moment, then continued, "And I'll become too similar to Master."

Tang Thirty-Six understood what he meant. After a few moments, he patted him on the shoulder to express his support and comfort, and then he walked out of the hall.

Chen Changsheng returned to the stone room.

He had spent all of the last few days practicing the sword within this room.

The stone room was very simple, so plain that it seemed rather sorry. There was nothing in it besides the prayer mat on the ground.

But now, a person had suddenly appeared in the room.

When had this person gotten here?

And how had they managed to sneak past the eyes of the thousands of priests within the Li Palace?

It was a gray-haired old man. His right hand gripped a wet brush and his left hand held a paint palette.

The paint on the palette was gray and the old man was also dressed in gray. What should have been white hair and brows had also been painted gray, the exact same color as the gray of the stone walls of this room.

Could it be that this old man had painted himself as a wall of this stone room?

If this was true, what sort of mystical painting technique was this?

The old man looked at Chen Changsheng and said with some satisfaction, "Fortunately, you understand what it means to place the world above all."

Chen Changsheng was quiet for a while, then he replied,
"Truthfully, I don't understand it very well."

An old master painter...is this is a good sign or a bad sign?

Chapter 1082 – Asking to Change the World

Xu Yourong's voice rose continuously from the Divine Path. It was clear and melodious, but no one associated it with the gurgling of a stream. Her voice was too cold and did not rise or fall, and it lacked any sort of pity. It was like a tiny pearl condensed from the coldest snow clattering against a frozen porcelain plate, instantly shattering into powder, leaving no evidence of its existence other than a chill upon the world.

Perhaps it was because she had been speaking of killing people this entire time.

Starting from her plans to kill Prince Chen Liu in the Prince of Xiang's estate, she had spoken of many topics related to killing people. The princes outside the Mausoleum of Books, the officials in the court and the provinces, and those Divine Generals who controlled the military—she had a plan to deal with each of them.

The temperature on the Divine Path dropped lower and lower as she spoke. In the obscured part of the snowstorm behind her, one could vaguely make out several lines, though it was not possible to tell if these were the marks of history, the marks of fate, or the movements of the lines across a Fated Star Plate.

After some time, she finally concluded her talk and gazed at Shang Xingzhou.

If the emperor really was standing with her and Chen Changsheng, then they truly did occupy the higher ground in this battle.

In the present situation, she had a very high chance of succeeding in those plans.

Shang Xingzhou did not think so, or perhaps he was not convinced, because he firmly believed that he deeply understood Chen Changsheng.

"That fellow is too inflexible and incapable, and he's also small-minded."

He taunted Xu Yourong, "You are sure that he has the daring?"

"I do not agree with your view. He only wishes to be a good person."

Xu Yourong's eyelashes trembled as she added, "And besides, today, it is me doing this, and you know that I can do it."

Shang Xingzhou mocked, "Does Wang Po know what you're thinking? And do the Mount Li Sword Sect and those other sects and clans know? If they knew you were so crazy, would they still support your decision? You are sure that they will continue to accompany you in going crazy up until the last moment?"

Xu Yourong said, "In a ship sailing toward the other shore of the sea of stars, all hands must be of one mind."

Shang Xingzhou asked, "And when have you seen a ship on the sea overturning on its own?"

"As long as there is sufficient pay, even the most pessimistic sailor will still hope to step on dry land until the true end arrives."

Xu Yourong continued, "On the contrary, this will only give them more faith in a certain victory."

Shang Xingzhou said, "So you coerced them."

Xu Yourong said, "I've read the history books. Whether hero or tyrant, they all had to resort to such methods to gather their forces."

"What of the Li Palace? The millions of believers in the north won't necessarily heed your will and follow your footsteps."

Shang Xingzhou gave her a faint smile and said, "Does Chen Changsheng know what you are really thinking?"

There was a pause, and then Xu Yourong declared, "I do not care."

Shang Xingzhou's eyes turned deep and serene as he asked, "Even if floods drown out the world?"

Xu Yourong calmly replied, "Even if the world drops into a bottomless chasm."

Shang Xingzhou calmly noted, "You will leave behind an eternally infamous reputation on the annals of history."

Xu Yourong calmly answered, "As I said before, I do not care."

Shang Xingzhou asked, "If the world falls into chaos and the people are plunged into misery, how will Chen Changsheng see you?"

Xu Yourong softly said, "I live for myself, not for anyone else, and certainly not because he loves me."

Shang Xingzhou praised, "Extraordinary, but I am not someone who takes threats."

Xu Yourong replied, "I want to try."

In that storm in Xunyang City, Wang Po had once said something similar when facing Zhu Luo.

Later, when Chen Changsheng was facing opponents so strong that they seemed invincible, he also said those words.

Today, Xu Yourong also said those four words.

Her eyes were very bright and her expression was very calm, but that resolved will within represented the greatest madness.

Shang Xingzhou asked, "How confident are you?"

Xu Yourong replied, "I used the Fated Star Plate to calculate the result seventeen times. Four of them had you accepting my demands while in three of them, I failed."

Shang Xingzhou arched his brow. "Four out of seventeen, and you dare threaten me?"

"In the remaining ten times, we all lost. The Great Zhou Dynasty

collapsed and any grandiose plans or dreams of conquering the world became a joke."

Xu Yourong calmly concluded, "So it is not four, but fourteen."

Shang Xingzhou gazed at the breathtakingly beautiful, seemingly delicate young girl in white for a very long time.

He suddenly said, "I also do not care."

Xu Yourong calmly gazed at him, seemingly guessing at what he was going to do.

Shang Xingzhou said, "Even if I agree to your request now, I can break my word at any time."

There were many legendary figures in Taizong's era, like the Prince of Hejian or Divine Generals Qin and Yu. Compared to these people, Shang Xingzhou was rather obscure.

In reality, he had accomplished many tasks, and his importance was no less than Wang Zhice's.

He only cared about practical results and cared nothing for reputation. Given his style, he was highly likely to choose a temporary retreat in the face of Xu Yourong's blizzard of an assault. Once the situation had calmed somewhat, he would launch his thunderous counterattack.

"Yes."

Xu Yourong faintly smiled. "So I demand even more."

Shang Xingzhou froze at these words, and then he smiled.

The Mausoleum of Books became extremely still. The faces of the people who heard these words contorted in shock.

Even the eyes of the Prince of Xiang and the Old Lady of the Mutuo clan were stupefied.

Because they had just heard the world's most absurd words.

.....

.....

From start to finish, Xu Yourong had never stated just what exactly she demanded from Shang Xingzhou. Shang Xingzhou had also never asked. But both of them and the people listening outside the Mausoleum of Books all knew that Xu Yourong was demanding that he retreat, reclude himself, retire.

Just a moment ago, Shang Xingzhou said that he could break his word at any moment, and so Xu Yourong said that she demanded even more...

What could be a demand greater than the practical concession and surrender that was retreating, recluding, and retiring oneself?

It presumably was not death, because Shang Xingzhou's obsession was to personally witness the human army breaking into Xuelao City, and such a demand was far too absurd.

But could it be self-crippling his cultivation? This was a similarly absurd demand... Who would agree to it?

How did Xu Yourong manage to suggest such an absurd and laughable demand?

The stillness in the Mausoleum of Books was broken by gasps and discussion.

Everyone thought that Xu Yourong was crazy.

Yet as time passed, these gasps and discussion gradually came to a stop.

The shock in the eyes of the crowd was even more intense, run through and through by disbelief.

The disciples of South Stream Temple could see that the faint smile on Shang Xingzhou's lips had already faded.

The people outside the mausoleum could see nothing and hear nothing, but this silence was extremely bizarre.

Was Shang Xingzhou really considering Xu Yourong's demand?

The Prince of Xiang's complexion suddenly turned extremely nasty.

The absurd could only occur with abnormal people.

And Shang Xingzhou was an abnormal person.

That Xu Yourong dared to make this demand meant that she had accurately observed that if she was crazy, Shang Xingzhou was even crazier!

"They're all crazy."

The Mutuo clan's Old Lady and the head of the Wu clan glanced at each other and saw the astonishment in each other's eyes.

"They're all crazy."

The Prince of Zhongshan muttered as he looked at the Mausoleum of Books, excitement appearing in his eyes.

Chapter 1083 – She Can Do It, and So Can I

The wind both inside and outside the Mausoleum of Books suddenly stopped, as did any sound.

The entire world seemed to freeze, both time and space.

The two sides had reached a stalemate, a deadlock.

This momentary balance was extremely fragile. Any variable, a wisp of wind or a single sound, could trigger countless cruel massacres, flooding the capital in seas of fire and blood, burning both prosperity and ambition into ashes.

Rarely did people dare to make a decision on the important crossroads of history.

Xu Yourong had proved that she could do it. Floods drowning out the world or a plunge into the bottomless abyss would not even cause her eyelashes to tremble.

And everyone knew that she would not quietly wait forever.

The Imperial Court's black-armored cavalry were galloping back to the capital.

If Shang Xingzhou was not willing to accept her demands, she would assuredly begin her assault before their arrival.

And at this crucial moment, the other important figure seemed to be asleep.

The Prince of Zhongshan looked in that person's direction and raised his brow.

No one wanted to see the negotiations between Xu Yourong and Shang Xingzhou break down except this brother of his.

The Prince of Xiang was an expert of the Divine Domain and had a deep backing within the court. He also possessed a formidable strength in the military.

If both the Imperial Court and the Orthodoxy came away with severe injuries and the experts of the north and south engaged in battle after bloody battle, who could stop him from ascending to the throne?

Xu Yourong and Shang Xingzhou were probably both aware of this, but neither of them mentioned the matter.

Because this was also one of the chips they were negotiating with.

The crux upon which the success of the negotiations ultimately hinged was still that demand.

The problem was that this was such a callous and unyielding demand that not even someone who had no opinion on life, such as the novice cook of some tavern in the western part of the capital who had lived the dullest, most mediocre, and extremely tough life, would be willing to agree to it. How could Shang Xingzhou?

.....

.....

There was no wind, but the white robe's hem drifted about like a paper flower.

Compared to actual flowers, paper flowers were cleaner, plainer, more tragic.

Xu Yourong stood on the Divine Path, her hands held behind her as she looked down upon the capital.

Her expression was very calm, but her beautiful and delicate features seemed to give off a grandiose aura.

Like she was standing before the ocean or observing the world.

Shang Xingzhou suddenly felt like he was looking at Tianhai—the Tianhai from many years ago, when she was still young.

The first time he saw that girl was back when Taizong was still alive, in the Imperial Palace.

At the time, he did not hate her. On the contrary, he admired her, or else he would not have chosen to help her ascend to the throne.

The Tianhai of that time was also very beautiful, but whether she was looking at that horse or Emperor Taizong, she always had a very emotionless expression.

This was precisely why Shang Xingzhou admired her.

If the heavens were to have feelings, they too would age. Only the emotionless could succeed at great undertakings.

Shang Xingzhou also deeply admired Xu Yourong.

Today, every word Xu Yourong had said, from her analysis of the overarching situation to her plot against Prince Chen Liu all the way until her final description of the world in chaos, assaulted the things he cared the most about, the thinnest part of his heart. At the same time, she was also doing one other important thing.

She was proving herself to Shang Xingzhou.

He had overturned the Tianhai Divine Empress's rule, returned the government to the Chen Imperial clan, and become the number one individual in the world.

Shang Xingzhou's life had reached perfection. He had no other desires except that one.

In demanding that he choose to give up and retreat, Xu Yourong had to prove that she could accomplish that task.

Chen Changsheng perhaps could not, and not even Yuren might be able to realize Taizong's dying wish, because they were good people.

But she could.

Because she was not a good person, as everything today had proved.

'You want to exterminate the demons. I can do it. You want the

humans to unite the world. I can also do that.

'And when the time comes, the Pope will still have the surname Chen, the Emperor will still have the surname Chen, and the human dynasty recorded in the history books will always have the surname Chen.

'Is there anything else that you are not content about? Anything else that you can't give up?'

If her threats to Shang Xingzhou's dreams, those callous methods, were waves that scraped the sky, the proofs that came with them were that calm underwater world. The two working together created countless waves, one after the other, stretching up into the sky and seeking to crush all resistance.

"The situation you have constructed today can be rated as perfect, grand enough to destroy the world and subtle enough to needle directly at one's heart. It truly is difficult to break."

Shang Xingzhou looked at Xu Yourong with both admiration and regret. "Because the people who can threaten you are not your enemies."

These last words had a rather complicated meaning and sounded somewhat awkward, but they understood what it meant.

"Chen Changsheng trusts me, so he remained silent this entire time. Alas, he was wrong."

Xu Yourong said, "Of course, I know that he will definitely have prepared some things, so I have also prepared myself for them."

Shang Xingzhou ruefully sighed, "I didn't think that you would not even let him go."

Xu Yourong said, "Since I want to defeat you, I naturally have to defeat your two students first."

Was this the reason for that conversation in the palace and the chat over stewed beef ribs in Fortune Peace Road?

Shang Xingzhou quietly gazed at her, then he suddenly said, "If I had not convinced him, perhaps you really would have won today."

As his words dropped, a wind suddenly stirred within the Mausoleum of Books, whisking away the bits of stone and grass on the Divine Path.

The wind had stirred because a cloud had descended.

A cloud on the horizon landed on the southern suburbs of the capital and then drifted toward the Mausoleum of Books.

The seal of the Mausoleum of Books seemed to have no effect on this cloud. It was not long before the cloud had drifted to the base of the Divine Path.

The person Shang Xingzhou had mentioned was sitting atop the cloud, a scholar dressed in simple cloth.

Within and without the Mausoleum of Books, tens of thousands of people who saw this scholar riding the cloud engaged in shocked speculation, and then they erupted in joy and ecstasy.

Xu Yourong looked at the middle-aged scholar, her expression still serene, but she felt a light fatigue on her mind.

And then, she felt a little derision, though this remained in her mind as well.

.....

.....

Hu Thirty-Two looked with a rather unpleasant expression at the dense crowd of people gathered at the plaza.

When Chen Changsheng said in that restaurant on Fortune Peace Road that he believed Xu Yourong would not do such a thing, he had become very worried.

Today's events had proved that his worries were well-founded.

An Hua was leading several hundred believers in kneeling on the plaza, each pair of hands clasping a bright and sharp knife.

Their request was very simple. They implored the Pope to not leave the Li Palace today and to not involve himself in the matter taking place at the Mausoleum of Books.

If Chen Changsheng was not willing to agree to their request, they would commit suicide in front of Chen Changsheng.

They were Chen Changsheng's most ardent followers, and there was no doubt that they would do such a thing for Chen Changsheng and the great cause of the Orthodoxy.

Hu Thirty-Two turned to glance at that quiet hall. He felt even more worried, but this was clearly because of another problem.

Chen Changsheng had said nothing to those voices coming from outside the hall.

The gray-robed elder with the brush said impatiently, "Hurry and tell this pack of fools to shut up!"

It was extremely rare to find a person who would dare treat the Pope with such disrespect.

In truth, when they first met in Mount Han, this elder had treated Chen Changsheng with great disdain.

The Demon Lord had sought to eat Chen Changsheng back then, and this old man and that traveling scholar had appeared together.

That this old man had appeared within the Li Palace in that stone room and watched Chen Changsheng for so many days was naturally on that scholar's orders.

Chen Changsheng was the Pope, but he also seemed incapable of refusing that scholar.

And many people thought that this scholar had good intentions.

By now, Chen Changsheng naturally knew this old man's identity.

He was the one acclaimed across the entire world in Taizong's era as the Painting Sage, Daoist Wu.

He had painted all those portraits in the Lingyan Pavilion.

The day Daoist Wu walked out of the gray wall, Chen Changsheng knew that Xu Yourong had lost.

She had still ended up underestimating his master, or perhaps it was better to say that she had underestimated these elders.

These elders were precisely those elders he had thought about on that deserted street in Wenshui.

It was those elders who had experienced countless wars, blood and fire, who had truly seen the world transform from seas into mulberry fields.

Chen Changsheng and Daoist Wu walked out of the hall.

Hu Thirty-Two looked with surprise at the gray-robed elder, but he did not dare ask. He stepped forward, up to Chen Changsheng's ear, and began to softly advise him how to proceed.

Daoist Wu grew increasingly impatient.

Chen Changsheng gazed at the gray and overcast sky and suddenly declared, "Strike."

Cavalry began to charge from Grass Moon Hall, dust rising in their wake.

Hu Thirty-Two's expression instantly changed. He wanted to kneel and continue pleading, but Chen Changsheng moved away.

Hu Thirty-Two's body leaned forward, falling toward Daoist Wu.

At some point, an extremely gloomy dagger had appeared in his hand.

His face continued to appear anguished and troubled, but his eyes were extremely calm.

Like the gloomy blade glow flying through the sky, they attracted

no attention whatsoever.

Daoist Wu's face instantly changed and a whistle burst from his lips. An unimaginably powerful energy descended together with his brush.

With a light pop, a gloomy willow branch flew through the air and caught the brush.

The Falling Star Stone appeared like the abyss of the Netherworld on the plaza, attracting everyone's attention and creating a barrier.

With a squelch, the dagger plunged into Daoist Wu's foot, causing blood to spurt out.

Hu Thirty-Two's head was lowered, his body half-kneeled. With an impassive expression, he extracted his dagger and stabbed it into Daoist Wu's belly.

Chapter 1084 – Xu Yourong's Question

At some point, Linghai Zhiwang and Daoist Siyuan had appeared at the two ends of the plaza.

Those cavalry that had just begun to charge suddenly called for their mounts to stop. Those fervent believers who had just been weeping a moment ago had now retreated under An Hua's guidance. They occasionally turned to fearfully glance at the center of the plaza, where fighting was still going on.

It was not only the Gloom Willow and the Falling Star Stone. The Mountain River Map and the Universe Stamp had also appeared in the Li Palace.

With the sudden appearance of the Li Palace's grand array, Daoist Wu lost his chance to counterattack.

A dagger had been thrust into his belly. If one's vision was good, they would even be able to see that this dagger had made a half-turn inside his belly.

A howl of pain broke out of Daoist Wu's lips while the brush in his hand and the palette concealed in his sleeve clattered to the floor.

Hu Thirty-Two pulled the dagger out and then stabbed it into Daoist Wu's other foot. He was fast, steady, and accurate.

He worked with great calm and focus, as if he had forgotten about anything else.

Daoist Wu let out another miserable scream. He fell to the ground and was powerless to get back up.

Blood gushed out of his body in an abnormally gory and cruel sight.

As the Painting Sage, Daoist Wu naturally had his extraordinary aspects. Even though he started cultivating late, he had lived a

thousand years and his cultivation level had long since reached an unfathomable level. Even under the suppression of the Li Palace's array, he should not have been so quickly captured without resistance.

But no errors could be allowed in this undertaking, and they would have to leave soon, so they could not leave Daoist Wu a single chance to counterattack. Thus, Chen Changsheng could only rely on this bloody method of fighting and use Hu Thirty-Two's most abnormal of daggers.

The Gloom Willow left the ground and returned to Linghai Zhiwang's hand. The Falling Star Stone let out a few rays of light before returning to the sword sheath.

"You will not die, so there is no need to worry."

Chen Changsheng took out his needles and stabbed them into several of Daoist Wu's vital Qi openings, helping him to staunch the flow of blood out of his belly.

Daoist Wu was pale and he shouted with irrepressible anger and incredulity, "You dare injure me!"

Chen Changsheng took three different pills from his sleeve and put them in Daoist Wu's mouth, but he did not answer.

Daoist Wu sternly said, "This is Lord Wang's will!"

Chen Changsheng continued to ignore him as he inspected the wounds on his feet and confirmed that they were not serious.

Daoist Wu felt like the pain from his wounds was increasing, and his rage and hatred peaked. He began to loudly shout, more and more filthy words and profanities working their way into his speech.

Chen Changsheng glanced at him, his eyes bright and serene.

Hu Thirty-Two whispered, "Your Holiness, should we stab him again?"

Daoist Wu instantly felt like there was a dagger in his chest. In terrible fear, he subconsciously shut his mouth.

An Hua arrived.

Chen Changsheng said, "I will hand him over to you."

An Hua already knew who this gray-robed elder was. Though a little nervous, she still nodded her head.

Chen Changsheng nodded and said, "In a little, the Li Palace will become rather empty. If somebody comes..."

An Hua's voice trembled as she answered, "I will kill him."

Chen Changsheng calmly and seriously said to her, "My meaning is, no matter who comes."

He was referring to that middle-aged scholar.

In terms of prestige and the status one held in the hearts of the people, if he spent many more years nurturing it, he would still be inferior to that scholar.

Only a person like An Hua could ignore that person's existence for his sake.

"No matter who comes, I will kill him."

An Hua's reply this time was very fast. Her voice had also calmed down. It no longer trembled, and seemed extremely determined.

Linghai Zhiwang and Daoist Siyuan gave her very appreciative gazes, and the former even gave her a word of advice.

"Remember to cut his head off. This will guarantee his death."

At these words, An Hua, who had just barely managed to calm herself down, was stupefied.

Finally, Hu Thirty-Two placed his dagger in her hand and smiled. "This dagger of mine is faster than most."

In the stomping of horse hoofs and the rising and falling of dust, the Li Palace quickly became deserted.

Those ordinary believers stood guard outside while the only people in the plaza were Daoist Wu in the pool of blood and An Hua with her two hands tightly grasping the dagger.

Two thousand Orthodoxy cavalry galloped out of the Li Palace through the Divine Avenue, incurring all sorts of surprised chatter.

All the bishops and enforcers, including Linghai Zhiwang, Daoist Siyuan, and Hu Thirty-Two, had also left.

No one noticed that Gou Hanshi and the Mount Li Sword Sect disciples had also taken their leave of the Hall of Announcements, as had the Archbishop of the Temple Seminary.

The Li Palace was now empty, and the activity around the Mausoleum of Books also meant that the area around the Li Palace was also empty.

But those examinees taking part in the Grand Examination had no idea of all this. The bishops supervising the Grand Examination within the Green Leaf World were also completely unaware.

Upon careful analysis, someone might have realized that the vast majority of the priests in the Green Leaf World belonged to the Orthodoxy's conservative faction.

Of course, the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education had always been the gathering ground for the Orthodoxy's conservative faction, and it was only proper that the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education manage the Grand Examination.

Before this event, no one could have objected to the Pope's decision.

The black-clothed girl hugged the Green Leaf and walked out of the Hall of Pure Virtue.

The majority of the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education was carried off with her.

Her expression was very indifferent, because she believed that this was just a very ordinary and trifling matter.

Today, she still had many important tasks to carry out.

Like getting revenge on that middle-aged scholar.

.....

.....

The middle-aged scholar was naturally Wang Zhice.

How could one describe him?

There was no adjective that could truly fit him.

He was a true legend.

He had an unimaginable status in the history of the Human race, his only lack being that he had never been emperor. Even now, he was still the commander most trusted by the demi-humans, their closest comrade. At the same time, he was also that expert most feared and worshipped by those demon dukes in Xuelao City.

As she looked at Wang Zhice, Xu Yourong suddenly smiled.

She was well aware that though they were both elders from Taizong's generation, Wang Zhice and Shang Xingzhou had never been on good terms.

In Taizong's later years, their relationship became even more ambiguous and dangerous.

Just like Daoist Wu, who was probably at the Li Palace right now, the person he was most afraid of in this world was the old Demon Lord, but right after him was Shang Xingzhou.

Perhaps it was better to call him Daoist Ji.

The portraits within the Lingyan Pavilion had all been painted by Daoist Wu.

But of the people depicted on those portraits, more than half had been killed by Daoist Ji.

Time could not dispel all hostility and fear, even if it was several hundred years. They were clearly opposed to each other, so why were they working together today?

Xu Yourong did not ask, because she already knew the answer.

It was once more the overarching situation, the world, the demons, and the northern expedition.

She suddenly thought, if Empress were still alive, what would she do in this situation?

The Empress would probably give a sigh of ridicule and disdain: 'Men...'

Xu Yourong's smile became even more dazzling as she thought of this.

Wang Zhice asked, "Why is the Holy Maiden smiling?"

Xu Yourong drew back her smile and indifferently answered, "Because I've suddenly thought of a possibility."

Wang Zhice warmly said, "Please speak."

"When you should appear, you never appear, and when you shouldn't appear, you decide to jump out."

Xu Yourong calmly asked him, "Lord Wang, Sir, have you gone senile?"

Chapter 1085 – Where the Dust Rises

Historians had many ways to divide the last one-thousand-some years. The most common choice was the founding of the Great Zhou, and many of them also chose to use the chaos of the Hundred Herb Garden and the ascension of Emperor Taizong as a crucial point. Amongst the populace, quite a few people also chose the moment when Wang Zhice suddenly leapt onto the stage of the world as the start of a new generation, dividing those one-thousand-some years into history before and after Wang Zhice.

Because the roles he had played in the northern expeditions against the demons had been far too important, his deeds far too legendary.

On this day in history, his appearance also divided history into a 'before' and 'after'.

Before Wang Zhice appeared, the air inside and outside the Mausoleum of Books was fraught with tension and everyone was uneasy and apprehensive to the extreme. After he appeared, many negative emotions were instantly banished and many people began to show expressions of joy, even ecstasy.

The people had finally confirmed that the rumor was true, that he was still alive, so he could naturally resolve all the problems the Human race would encounter.

Even the sunlight of early spring seemed to grow more brilliant in anticipation.

It was at this moment that they heard a question.

"Lord Wang, Sir, have you gone senile?"

.....

.....

The conversation between Wang Zhice and Xu Yourong was not

intentionally concealed from the people within and without the Mausoleum of Books.

The former did not due to his self-confidence and because there was nothing that he was not willing to speak of, while the latter did not because of a faint disappointment and the will to fight that came with it.

Xu Yourong's question threw everyone inside and outside the Mausoleum of Books into an uproar.

'Lord Wang' was the respectful address that the entire Human race had given Wang Zhice, and she had even called him 'Sir'.

But nobody would believe that this question was out of true concern.

Even though she was the Holy Maiden of the south, was the greatest pride and treasure of the capital, the people could still not accept such disrespect from her.

Outside the Mausoleum of Books, excited chatter could be heard, mixed with angry rebukes.

Even the Mount Li Sword Hall elders and the other experts in the forest slightly creased their brows at this question, deeply disapproving of this discourtesy.

The Old Lady of the Mutuo clan and the head of the Wu clan once more glanced at each other, and then they wordlessly shook their heads, already prepared to concede and leave the capital.

Xu Yourong ignored the turmoil outside the Mausoleum of Books, and she also cared not for the reactions of the southern experts.

She calmly gazed at Wang Zhice.

Shang Xingzhou stood within the sword array, silently and apathetically watching on.

Outside the sword array, Wang Zhice faintly smiled, apparently

unconcerned by her deep derision.

He was well-read in the Daoist Canon and well-versed in worldly matters. He was naturally aware of Xu Yourong's current emotional state and where those emotions came from.

When Xu Yourong spoke of how he had never appeared when he should have appeared, she naturally referred to those times when the world needed him.

Like that sea of blood that engulfed the Orthodox Academy twenty-some years ago, or that heaven-shaking coup that had taken place in the Mausoleum of Books three years ago.

At these crucial pivots in history, Wang Zhice truly had not appeared, but he had appeared at other moments.

Back then, he had left the capital in low spirits, no longer concerning himself with the battles for power and authority in the court.

He wandered the four seas and secluded himself deep in the wilderness.

But he still cared about the future of the Human race.

So when the Demon Lord attempted to kill Chen Changsheng, he had appeared in Mount Han.

On the night that the Demon Lord died, he had appeared in the snowy mountains.

During White Emperor City's internal strife some time ago, he had appeared in the snowy plains of the north.

Wang Zhice said, "I once saw Chen Changsheng."

Xu Yourong answered, "I know."

Wang Zhice added, "At the time, I was also prepared to go and see you and Qiushan."

Xu Yourong asked, "You've seen me today. Are you

disappointed?"

Wang Zhice smiled and shook his head.

He did not care about Xu Yourong's rudeness from just now.

In his view, this was just a little girl getting angry after failing to collect all sorts of rouge, despite many days of hard work.

Xu Yourong's performance today was sufficiently outstanding. Disappointment was out of the question.

But he had confirmed today that Xu Yourong had grasped the supreme and emotionless Dao.

And he had always been a man of many emotions.

Their Daos were different, so it was naturally hard to scheme against him.

Two people walking different paths could naturally only be strangers.

This made him feel somewhat regretful.

"You say you want to try, and so I also want to try."

Wang Zhice looked at Xu Yourong and said, "I want to try and persuade you to give up on this crazy way of thinking."

"Persuade?"

Xu Yourong's lips curled into a smile.

This time, the derision in her smile seemed even thicker.

In her view, Wang Zhice's saying that he wanted to persuade her to give up was proof that he had already made a choice.

And he had also made a choice for the entire Human race.

What other choice did she have than to accept?

Such persuasion was not real persuasion, as it had nothing to do with reasoning.

Today, Xu Yourong had been able to force Shang Xingzhou into

this impasse because she had ultimately not chosen victory, but to set the entire world ablaze.

This was Zhou Dufu's blade style.

She could do this because many factions were willing to follow her.

These were the sects and clans of the south, the cavalry and believers of the Orthodoxy.

But now that Wang Zhice had appeared, her plan had been shattered.

And this was not even taking into account his unfathomable cultivation, that he was a supreme expert on par with Taizong and Zhou Dufu.

Just his name alone was enough to alter the entire situation.

His prestige was so high that no one in the world could surpass it.

Now that he stood across from Xu Yourong, who would still be willing to follow her?

The disciples of South Stream Temple had not put down their swords, but upon learning of Wang Zhice's identity, the looks on their faces became rather strange.

And just which of the Orthodoxy's experts, whether in the southern region of the Mausoleum of Books or within the capital, would dare attack Wang Zhice?

Even if there were still people loyal to her, she could no longer accomplish her goal of burning down the entire world.

In other words, she could no longer threaten Shang Xingzhou.

From this perspective, the person most familiar with the Halving Blade Style was still, as expected, Wang Zhice.

Even on the day that Zhou Dufu returned to the sea of stars, he had still not managed to surpass his elder brother.

But he knew that if one wanted to stop the blade that was the World Ablaze, one had to do so before the fire was lit.

The chilly spring breeze was still chilly. It blew from beneath the cloud over the two sides of the Divine Path, rustling the grass.

The two plumes of dust rising from the plains were a sign that the terrifying black-armored heavy cavalry were about to return to the capital.

The entire world was silent. Everyone was waiting for Xu Yourong to admit that she had lost.

Suddenly, the Mausoleum of Books began to quake.

The water of the shallow canals in front of the Divine Path began to lift from the ground like clear sheets of paper.

The river around the Mausoleum of Books began to ripple and slosh. The green duckweed that had just grown out a few days ago was stirred by the turmoil into pieces.

The quaking came from the plains to the south.

The capital had the barrier of the Mausoleum of Books, so, fortunately, no houses collapsed, but countless people still walked onto the streets in the panic, looking just like ants.

In shock, the crowd looked toward those plains and witnessed an extremely bizarre sight.

The dust stirred from the black-armored heavy cavalry that were only ten-some li from the capital had suddenly disappeared.

It had been replaced by an even thicker plume of dust. It rose into the air, obscuring the sun. It looked just like a black dragon.

The terrifying plume of dust rising from the plain caused the complexions of Wang Zhice, Shang Xingzhou, Wang Po, and the Prince of Xiang to change at the same time.

As experts of the Divine Domain, they could naturally tell that this black dragon really was formed from dust.

The problem was that the place where the dust was rising from was the capital's final barrier to the south: Mount Mo.

Mount Mo had collapsed!

Chapter 1086 – Where the Dust Falls

The black armor was covered in dust, but it did not seem old. On the contrary, it exuded an aura of extreme terror.

But none of the subjects of the Great Zhou Dynasty would be afraid. When the peasants in the fields by the road heard those thunderous hooves and saw the black armor of those horsemen, they would halt their labors and kowtow while the children playing on the trees would yell out in excitement.

Because they knew that these cavalry were the Great Zhou Army's finest troops, their mounts the strongest Dragonhorses. Equipped in that gloomy black armor, they were the Great Zhou Dynasty's, even the entire Human race's, greatest pride, the invincible army created by Emperor Taizong: the black-armored cavalry.

The heavy cavalry of this black-armored cavalry were currently making their way to the capital.

The black-armored heavy cavalry had the most powerful and lethal weapons on the continent.

Divine General He Ming was the leader of these heavy cavalry.

Back when Chen Guansong had just taken on the post of Principal of Star Seizer Academy, he was the vice principal.

In that period, the Tianhai Divine Empress and many other people had regarded him as Chen Guansong's most exceptional comrade, his most reliable aide.

Ten years ago, he had been transferred to lead the black-armored heavy cavalry. His performance remained superb, but his taciturn and inconspicuous personality meant that the common people did not hear of his deeds, and he had been obscured beneath the brilliance of Xue Xingchuan and others.

Two thousand heavy cavalry were rushing to reinforce the

capital. In terms of strategy, this was an extremely risky action, an unwise decision. It was certain that many Dragonhorses would die under the dual pressures of a long journey and heavy armor, and the troops themselves would shed some of their numbers. But after receiving the urgent message by Red Goose from the capital, the long-prepared Divine General He Ming did not hesitate. He ordered his subordinates to break camp, because the capital needed two thousand black-armored heavy cavalry to guard it.

Only this way could those cultivators be more obedient, could the Great Zhou Dynasty be at peace, could the northern expedition proceed without fail!

As Divine General He Ming pondered these matters, his gaze pierced through Mount Mo before him, descending on an even farther place.

Mount Mo was the last barrier of the foothills to the south of the capital.

One could already faintly make out the capital.

The capital had no city wall, and the Imperial City itself was not very tall, so when he saw the capital, he was really looking at the Mausoleum of Books to its south.

He already knew through the message of the Red Goose that Xu Yourong had brought many southern experts and trapped the venerable Daoist, and that the Li Palace could move at any time.

Divine General He Ming did not know the specific details, but the fact that the venerable Daoist had been trapped was shocking on its own and made him think about many things.

He rather admired Xu Yourong, even though he had never been able to stand Xu Shiji in these last ten-some years.

He felt that if she were a man, she could have become the general of a generation.

As he thought about these matters, his mood became more

complicated.

Many years ago, he had participated in a full moon banquet at the Xu Estate, where he had held that little girl who seemed to be carved from jade.

He had already reached Mount Mo. Just a little longer, and he and his two thousand heavy cavalry would reach the Mausoleum of Books, where they would assault the traitors.

The once-little girl would probably die today, no?

And just how many of the cavalry he led that should have been killing their way into Xuelao City would die today?

Suddenly, several shrill cries came from the sky as a Red Goose flew like a bolt of lightning to the ground. It was warning that a strong foe was attacking.

The black-armored heavy cavalry truly deserved their reputation as the strongest force on the continent.

With a clattering of metal, the two thousand cavalry quickly came to a stop, a sea meeting a dam.

This black tide of cavalry, ordered through waving banners, quickly set up an array.

A forest of spears aimed at the sky, unleashing a Qi of iron and blood that seemed to physically attack the sky.

This Qi of blood and iron concealed many terrifying ballistae and a dangerous array.

These were truly lethal techniques. Even a Divine Domain expert would find it hard to gain any sort of advantage.

But the array and lethal techniques of these two thousand black-armored heavy cavalry were all ultimately useless.

Because the target of the enemy's attack had never been the cavalry, but the nearby Mount Mo.

A streak of light drew out a straight line in the sky that quickly disappeared.

At the front of this line was a little black dot.

This little black dot had used an incomprehensibly terrifying speed to reach the peak of Mount Mo.

At that moment, everything in the world went still, whether it was the puffs of steam rising from the nostrils of the Dragonhorses or the spring breeze curling around the black armor.

The entire world was so still that it did not seem real.

And then, a rumble shattered the stillness.

A boom like both thunder and the roaring of thousands of monsters came from deep under Mount Mo.

The ground fiercely quaked. Both the hardy rocks and the soft meadows of grass began to visibly ripple.

As the rumbling rose from the ground, countless cracks began to appear on Mount Mo.

In an extremely short time, countless rocks had broken off from the mountain, shooting through the sky and then crashing down in grandiose plumes of dust.

The quaking intensified, and the addition of the massive rocks flying through the air threw the entire place into even greater disorder.

The neighs of Dragonhorses could be heard within the dust, but they had all been personally raised by Qiushan Jun at Sloping Cliff Horse Farm, so even in these circumstances, they did not panic. Coupled with the protection of the array, the two thousand cavalry did not suffer a destructive blow, but were thrown into disorder by the uneven ground and the terrifying boulders.

The soldiers quickly waved the banners in their hands to communicate with the troops, their expression concerned, but the

veil of dust blocked their comrades' visibility.

The array masters shouted and worked together while experts of the army began to launch attacks on the massive rocks that had made it past the array. Even Divine General He Ming acted, but the ballistae in the center of the army did not. They still pointed at a certain area in the dust, while lethality still remained concealed behind strict discipline and the will to unflinchingly face death.

After some time, the dust gradually settled and the cavalry were finally able to see the scene in front of them.

Those cavalry who had remained extremely calm in the face of such a chaotic situation were finally shocked.

The Mount Mo that had been in front of their eyes just a moment ago had disappeared.

.....

.....

Mount Mo was not tall, only a hundred-some zhang, but it was still a mountain.

Who could convert an actual mountain into a field of rubble and collapsed cliffs in such a short time?

As the dust settled, a girl dressed in black appeared.

Her exquisite face featured an absolutely cold visage.

That cinnabar birthmark of hers seemed to give off a monstrously fiendish air.

Her feet were bare.

Because the moment her foot landed on the summit, the chain on her feet had been pulverized into the smallest of existences.

The cavalry were stunned as they thought, was it really just this seemingly immature girl in black who knocked down all of Mount Mo?

Suddenly, innumerable neighs filled with a terrible fear rose from the cavalry.

The Dragonhorses that had managed to remain calm while the mountain collapsed and stone rained down had suddenly begun to move restlessly in panic.

After a while, they began to kneel toward the black-clothed girl, expressing their servitude.

The cavalry were cast onto the ground, causing even greater chaos.

As he looked at the black-clothed girl, Divine General He Ming slowly raised his right hand, his mood rather gloomy.

Accompanied by a white light, a divine Qi rose from the middle of the army.

The black-clothed girl gave him an indifferent glance.

Chapter 1087 – Three Divisions of Cavalry on the March

At the black-clothed girl's gaze, He Ming suddenly calmed down. He was so relieved that he even smiled.

But his right hand was still raised in the air, ready at any time to clench into a fist and order the two thousand black-armored heavy cavalry to attack.

The girl moved her gaze to the still-disorderly cavalry. She seemed to think of something, her brows knitting together.

In a gust of wind, she vanished.

The rest of the wind once more took up the dust rising from Mount Mo and sent it drifting toward the cavalry.

The dust was scattered in the wind, making no shape or form.

Countless milky white rays of light suddenly pierced out, making the dust seem like white gauze.

These rays of divine Qi came from the bows and arrows in the hands of the cavalry.

It was not the divine ballistae concealed in the middle of the cavalry that was their most frightening weapon, but these Sacred Light arrows.

Had the black-clothed girl sensed the Sacred Light arrows and chosen to retreat?

A deputy general came up to He Ming. As he looked toward the direction in which the girl had vanished, he placed his hand on his sword and said, "Quite the fast reaction."

There was a clear unwillingness in this comment.

The black-clothed girl had appeared too suddenly and landed too quickly. Neither the true experts within the heavy cavalry nor the

array masters had time to react.

In the deputy general's view, if the girl had been just a little slow in leaving or if a similar situation occurred, the black-armored cavalry would definitely have a chance to hold her.

Even though the girl had displayed such terrifying destructive powers.

He Ming gazed silently in the direction the girl vanished.

He did not agree with the deputy general.

The black-armored cavalry had crisscrossed the world and never once tasted failure. They naturally had ways to deal with experts. He was even confident that they could contend with an expert of the Divine Domain for a time. The problem was, if he guessed correctly, that girl just now was not an ordinary expert, but a dragon...

"What? That was a dragon?"

Divine General He Ming's words were so shocking that the deputy general and the surrounding officers found it hard to speak.

He Ming said with a slightly bitter voice, "Yes, and it should be a Black Frost Dragon."

The deputy general was even more stunned, and then speechless as he subconsciously grabbed his hair.

If the girl in black really was such a being, then she had not retreated out of fear, but because she was going easy...

Yes, one could have guessed this the moment she landed on the summit of Mount Mo and not launched an assault directly on the cavalry. If she had let the cavalry first enter Mount Mo before she began her assault, this plus the innate pressure she placed on the Dragonhorses would have made the black-armored heavy cavalry suffer almost unbearable casualties, even if they were not completely destroyed.

Since ancient times, the bane of the black-armored cavalry had never been those Divine experts who rode on clouds and remained untouched by the world, but dragons.

It was said that a thousand years ago, when Emperor Taizong was building up the black-armored cavalry, he had developed and even trained them in methods specifically for dealing powerful dragons.

Later on, the agreement sworn on the starry skies meant that dragons no longer stepped forth onto the continent and the world gradually forgot the terror of these high-level beings. The black-armored heavy cavalry had also reached its fourth generation, and those once-practiced methods had long been forgotten on some ancient pile of paper within the Ministry of the Army.

An officer came to his senses and asked, "A dragon dares to come to the continent? Is she not afraid of being executed by the Divine experts?"

"The current experts of the Divine all have different thoughts. How could they come with a united will to carry out that agreement?"

Divine General He Ming added, "And when both sides reached that agreement, they forgot about her existence, so her name isn't there."

The deputy general asked, "Just who is that black-clothed girl?"

"All of you probably already know. She is the dragon envoy of His Holiness the Pope."

After a pause, He Ming added, "She is also that taboo of the Imperial Palace."

Now that the Tianhai Divine Empress had returned to the sea of stars, many of her secrets were gradually being revealed under the sunlight, and this naturally included the legend of the Black Dragon.

The uneven bulges of the plains seemed like frozen waves of

wheat. The black-armored cavalry stood amongst them, not making a single sound.

Suddenly, He Ming made a self-mocking smile, but his eyes turned hard as he ordered, "Establish the Peerless Turbid Wave Array."

The black-armored cavalry which was famed for its discipline seemed rather strange at this moment.

The officers looked at him with strange gazes instead of immediately issuing the order.

Because Divine General He Ming had said 'Peerless Turbid Wave Array'.

This array was renowned for being sturdy and steadfast and was ideal for protecting against attacks while resting and reorganizing.

With Mount Mo destroyed and the morale of the troops wavering, Divine General He Ming's plan was very reasonable.

But the Peerless Turbid Wave Array moved... very slowly.

If they used this array and moved forward, they probably wouldn't even reach the Mausoleum of Books by dusk. What meaning would there be then?

The deputy general looked at Divine General He Ming and wanted to object, but he suddenly thought of something and paled, withdrawing his words.

.....

.....

The entire capital could feel the collapse of Mount Mo.

The houses lining the Luo River swayed but did not collapse. Dust rose up between the ground and roof beams, causing the entire world to be caked in dust.

The complicated figures carved on the stone pillars became

somewhat blurry. The room with all sorts of plum blossoms planted in it, on the other hand, had been covered in dust ages ago.

The maple trees standing outside the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education had lost many branches. They now lay scattered on the streets, but a careful observer would see signs of an array in the mess.

The maple branches and the array hidden within them blocked the black-clothed cavalry belonging to the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education outside.

The three cardinals of the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education and its priests had entered the Green Leaf World for the Grand Examination, which was currently being carried by the black-clothed girl.

Right now, the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education had no strength to resist the Li Palace's will.

In the shortest period of time, the Li Palace cavalry completed their occupation of this famous building.

The cavalry of the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education standing outside the forest somewhat helplessly and gratefully put down their weapons.

.....

.....

The Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education was the headquarters of the Orthodoxy's conservative faction, its direct subordinates the famous Six Ivies. However, the only one that truly needed taking care of today was the Heavenly Dao Academy.

At the same time, the Heavenly Dao Academy was also the most troublesome of places.

Its reputation and relationship with Mao Qiuyu meant that the Li Palace could not use force.

Linghai Zhiwang slightly leaned forward, staring in loathing at the stubborn faces of the teachers and students within the Heavenly Dao Academy.

That he had been regarded highly by both the Pope and the Tianhai Divine Empress at the same time was because he had never been naive, even when he was a youth.

What he hated most in his life was naivete, hot blood, and passion, but he knew that these were very troublesome traits, because they all pointed straight to the word 'sacrifice'.

He naturally didn't care if these teachers and students of the Heavenly Dao Academy became a pile of corpses.

But this would affect the Pope's prestige and would certainly affect Mao Qiuyu's relationship with the Li Palace.

It was clear that Zhuang Zhihuan clearly understood these things, so even though he had learned about what had happened in the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education, he was still not willing to surrender.

He hoped that these young and idealistic students willing to sacrifice themselves could help him last until good news came from the Mausoleum of Books.

Linghai Zhiwang glanced at the old Daoist at his side and asked, "You're the vice principal, so why won't the students listen to you?"

This old Daoist was Daoist Shuxin. He sighed and did not answer.

Back when Mao Qiuyu was in seclusion within the Li Palace, guarded by his disciple Zhuang Zhihuan, the Heavenly Dao Academy had been under the management of Daoist Shuxin.

Linghai Zhiwang, who had made this suggestion, had hoped that Daoist Shuxin could use this period of time to strengthen his control over the Heavenly Dao Academy in preparation for this day.

Zhuang Zhihuan's prestige in the Heavenly Dao Academy had been higher than he had imagined.

The curses from the young students grew louder and louder.

Linghai Zhiwang's complexion darkened as he said, "Count down from five. Prepare to kill."

Daoist Shuxin was stunned by these words and implored, "Absolutely not!"

Linghai Zhiwang ignored him.

With a metal clattering, the Orthodoxy cavalry slowly took out their swords, which glimmered with Sacred Light.

The black enforcers of the Hall of Heavenly Judgment silently infiltrated the Heavenly Dao Academy like several dozen ghosts.

Chapter 1088 – A Dragon Cry - Preview

The Orthodoxy cavalry preparing to charge inspired no fear in the several hundred teachers and students of the Heavenly Dao Academy. On the contrary, they became even more passionate, their shouts getting louder as their wills became even more united.

Other than the slogan of 'Protect the Heavenly Dao', many of the students were cursing at people, the greatest target of their ire naturally being Daoist Shuxin, who they regarded as a traitor who had sold out the academy for glory. Linghai Zhiwang's name was also a common occurrence, and someone would even disrespect the Pope on occasion.

Linghai Zhiwang's complexion grew gloomier and gloomier as he listened to those curses, but if one carefully looked, they would realize that the emotions in his eyes never once changed.

In terms of strength, it was naturally the Li Palace that held the absolute advantage.

The Orthodoxy cavalry was an existence of equal renown to the black-armored cavalry, and the black enforcers of the Hall of Heavenly Judgment had once been mentioned alongside the Department for Purging Officials and the assassins of the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets.

The Heavenly Dao Academy truly had deep foundations and had raised many experts, and many bishops in the Li Palace had come from it, but it was still just a school.

The Heavenly Dao Academy had been able to last so long because Zhuang Zhihuan's heart was hard enough and the blood of the teachers and students was sufficiently hot.

And if the Li Palace was willing to use force against these teachers and students who were willing to lose their heads and spill their blood, a massacre was bound to ensue. Moreover, the current

situation had a different cause from the bloody incident of the Orthodox Academy twenty-some years ago. Linghai Zhiwang, as the one in charge of this matter, was certain to enjoy infamy for a thousand years, while Chen Changsheng would not fare much better.

What the Li Palace had to do was make the teachers and students of the Heavenly Dao Academy give up while spilling as little blood as possible.

Yet Linghai Zhiwang's eyes remained cold and indifferent, the pleading of Daoist Shuxin failing to make him retract his order.

As he watched the Orthodoxy cavalry ready their charge and those black enforcers raise the scythes of death in their hands, Daoist Shuxin was overcome with sorrow and despair.

He seemed to be seeing the Heavenly Dao Academy awash in a sea of blood and the tender faces of the young students collapsed in pools of blood.

And then he felt like he was going blind. The Heavenly Dao Academy had not turned into a sea of blood, but one of ink.

A shadow dropped down from the sky, falling over the ancient buildings of the Heavenly Dao Academy.

This shadow was so deep that it seemed to have physical form. It seemed like night had descended.

The angry curses stopped as the young students of the Heavenly Dao Academy looked up in confusion toward the sky.

They did not see the bringer of that shadow.

The countless snowflakes dropping from the overcast sky obscured all vision.

"It's snowing!" a student shouted in excitement.

"How can it be snowing?" another student shouted in surprise.

It was early spring. Even if there was a cold spell in late spring, it

didn't make sense for it to snow.

The students were astonished and began to talk. Some people even forgot about those cavalry brimming with killing intent outside the gate.

But there were still many people who remembered what sort of situation the Heavenly Dao Academy and their schoolmates were in.

As she watched the beautiful snowflakes dropping down from the sky, a beautiful female student began to tear up as she muttered, "The Heavenly Dao above believes that this world is too filthy and so has sent down this sacred snow to purify our eyes and hearts?"

Some students overheard her and felt the same. They prayed toward the sky, somewhat sad, but their resolves even more firm.

Linghai Zhiwang coldly said, "After the snow melts, the ground remains covered in filth. Can a god deceive itself as well as others?"

A low and thunderous boom suddenly exploded in the sky.

It was an incredibly deep boom and not at all weak. It was like thunder hidden deep within the clouds or a river deep within the earth.

The people looked up toward the sky in consternation as they thought, was that the response from the heavens?

Was it a reply to the female student? Or to Linghai Zhiwang?

This voice had an extremely clear will.

It was one of indifference, of looking down upon the world, and of a lack of interest.

Zhuang Zhihuan's expression had not changed in response to the Orthodoxy cavalry brought by Linghai Zhiwang, or the several teachers Daoist Shuxin had brought with him.

But that thunderous roar made his expression turn rather strange, and a hint of hesitation and intent to retreat appeared in

the depths of his eyes.

He had recognized this sound.

It was a dragon cry.

.....

.....

The amount of snow falling from the sky instantly increased by several dozen times while the wind became cold and biting.

The fierce snowstorm caused the temperature within and without the Heavenly Dao Academy to rapidly drop.

Whether it was the ivy on the stone walls or that ancient thousand-year-old tree in the deepest part of the campus, they all became plants of beautiful white jade.

Several small lakes became covered in thin layers of ice which rapidly began to thicken. In a few seconds, they became lakes of ice, as smooth as mirrors.

In a certain remote courtyard, the water in its deep well completely froze, cracking the surrounding ground.

The entire world became white, a realm of ice and snow.

The majority of the ordinary students became snowmen.

They could still see and think, but not move. A stupefied expression was frozen onto their faces.

Zhuang Zhihuan was a genius in his youth and he was now at a level where the number of experts on par with him could be counted with one's fingers. He was naturally able to get by without any problem.

Ten-some teachers and students of excellent cultivation were also able to endure.

Their faces were pale, their lips turning blue.

The cold encroaching on the Qi openings and Ethereal Palaces of

these teachers and students had dealt them internal injuries.

But Zhuang Zhihuan's face was pale because he had abruptly realized that he had nothing to rely on.

Where had this snowstorm come from?

Why was it so fierce and terrifying?

This was the question that filled the students and teachers of the Heavenly Dao Academy with fear.

At this moment, a figure slowly walked out of the snow.

This figure had a rather strange posture as they walked, seemingly uncoordinated yet also giving off a particularly steady feeling.

Perhaps it was because this person had only one arm?

When they saw that figure, that empty sleeve flapping in the strong winds...

Even the eyes of those young students who could not move or show their emotions on their face filled with joy.

Those teachers and students who could still talk let out cries of delight.

"Senior Guan Bai!"

"Famous Name!"

"Senior Brother!"

.....

.....

Guan Bai entered the Heavenly Dao Academy along that famous stone avenue, and then he stopped.

He stood between the two stone walls.

There were many names on the stone wall, and a line of words had been carved at the very top: 'Good wind, let me borrow your

strength to soar up to the azure sky.'

This was the Proclamation of Azure Sky.

When he was studying at the Heavenly Dao Academy, his name had once appeared on this stone wall, and it had been at the very top.

For this reason and for many other reasons, he had always been the Heavenly Dao Academy's greatest pride, then and now.

So even though they clearly knew that his strength was not enough to alter the current situation, the students of the Heavenly Dao Academy still could not help but cry out in delight.

But then, all voices vanished; all delight turned to shock.

Because Guan Bai looked at Zhuang Zhihuan and spoke.

"Teacher, just concede."

Chapter 1089 – The Silent Spring Day

The fierce snowstorm gradually died down.

Only with no wind could the snow stick.

The snow covered more and more names on that stone wall.

The Heavenly Dao Academy was deathly still.

After some time, Zhuang Zhihuan finally walked out from behind the several hundred snowmen.

This was the first time since the Orthodoxy cavalry had surrounded the Heavenly Dao Academy that he had actually stood in front of the teachers and students.

Because the speaker was the disciple he was most proud of: Famous Name Guan Bai.

It was also because many people had already become snowmen, leaving him no place to hide.

He looked at Guan Bai with cold and indifferent eyes.

"Why?"

"Because Teacher is wrong."

"According to the information from the Mausoleum of Books, it should have been the Holy Maiden that arranged for you to return to the capital."

"His Holiness wrote me a letter beforehand."

"You've been watching the entire time?"

"Yes, because I had to make sure."

"Make sure that I was wrong?"

Guan Bai gazed with mixed feelings at his beloved teacher as he said, "Correct, because no one has the right to use the lives of others to satisfy their own way of thinking."

Zhuang Zhihuan was quiet for a very long time. Finally, he said, "So... you were just making sure."

Guan Bai's eyes became much calmer as he said, "Because at the very start, I did not believe that Teacher was this sort of person."

Zhuang Zhihuan understood everything. He softly said, "It seems that His Holiness really does value you. He actually used so many forces just so you could watch this play."

Guan Bai replied, "His Holiness is merciful and did not wish to see the Heavenly Dao Academy burned to ash for Teacher's ambition, so His Holiness treated me with great patience."

"Ah, ambition..."

Zhuang Zhihuan gazed into the distance, though it was hard to say whether he was thinking about Wenshui or the hometown he had not visited in ages. He repeated that word again.

Guan Bai wanted to know why he was sighing so emotionally.

After some time, Zhuang Zhihuan looked back to him and said, "Yes, I have ambition, and a great one. After all, I have the appropriate ability, a very high cultivation level, and powerful strength. And I'm also very young, so why can't I pursue it?"

Guan Bai sternly said, "Teacher once taught me that one could achieve the Great Dao from the straight, so there was no need to pursue the bends and twists."

Zhuang Zhihuan indifferently said, "Senior Brother Mao treated me extremely well and I also had a relationship with the chief branch of the Tang clan. If I stood on His Holiness the Pope's side, I could also have obtained what I wanted. I could have kindled my ambition into a true wildfire, burning it most beautifully."

Guan Bai said, "This is precisely what I don't understand."

Zhuang Zhihuan asked, "Have you also forgotten how Zhuang Huanyu died?"

Several years ago, Chen Changsheng brought Su Li back to the south from the snowy plains. Passing through Xunyang City, he was on the verge of returning to the capital.

On that night, Zhuang Huanyu, under a formidable mental pressure, chose to cut his throat by a well.

That courtyard was still in a remote part of the Heavenly Dao Academy and that well was still there, but it had remained uninhabited this entire time.

Many people had already forgotten the events of the Garden of Zhou, had forgotten about that outstanding youth that had come to the Heavenly Dao Academy after Guan Bai.

Today's fierce cold had caused the ground around that well to fissure into an unrepairable state.

Those memories had also been forced out of the cold ground.

Zhuang Zhihuan naturally would not forget this matter, nor would Guan Bai.

During the All-School Martial Exhibition, he had challenged Chen Changsheng precisely for this matter.

He was rather grief-stricken as he asked, "Has Teacher still not forgotten about that matter?"

Whether it was through his relationship with Tang Thirty-Six or Principal Mao, Zhuang Zhihuan should have been one of Chen Changsheng's trusted aides.

Had he chosen the other side just for this reason?

Zhuang Zhihuan shook his head. "Zhuang Huanyu died because his heart was too weak. It has nothing to do with His Holiness."

Confused, Guan Bai asked, "Then why do all this?"

Zhuang Zhihuan lightly said, "I truly do not hate His Holiness. The problem is, who will believe me?"

Guan Bai was speechless.

Yes, even if the Pope trusted him, would Linghai Zhiwang? Would Daoist Siyuan? Would the Holy Maiden?

"Since I am incapable of walking this path, I can only choose the other method to burn my ambition."

Zhuang Zhihuan's hand rested on his chest, and he said, "Or else this place will never be at peace."

Guan Bai advised, "Yet now that you have failed, why not give up?"

"You've seen my true face and now want me to give up? Who do you think you are?"

Zhuang Zhihuan mocked, "You're my student. What right do you have to judge right and wrong? And what right do you have to ask me to give up?"

There was a pause, then Guan Bai declared, "Right now, I am speaking with you in my capacity as Archbishop of the Hall of Illustrious Persons."

Cries of shock rose from the teachers and students of the Heavenly Dao Academy.

The previous Archbishop of the Hall of Illustrious Persons was the old Principal of the Heavenly Dao Academy, Mao Qiuyu.

They had believed that after Principal Mao Qiuyu broke into the Divine Domain, Zhuang Zhihuan was certain to become the Archbishop of the Hall of Illustrious Persons.

No one had expected that the Li Palace would send firm word that the Pope had no such intention.

The teachers and students of the Heavenly Dao Academy were at first dejected, and then furious. Today's situation was in large part related to this matter.

The true circumstances had taken them all by surprise.

The position of Archbishop of the Hall of Illustrious Persons had been taken up by Senior Guan Bai?

The Li Palace was not suppressing the Heavenly Dao Academy?

Could it be... that Principal Mao had not been forced to leave by the Pope?

Then what would happen next?

Zhuang Zhihuan had taught in the Heavenly Dao Academy for many years and truly did have a very high prestige there.

But in the minds of these young students, Senior Guan Bai was their greatest pride, a true model in terms of both cultivation and conduct.

The snow had stopped a long time ago and spring was gradually returning to the world. Accumulated snow was hard to melt, so those students that had been made into snowmen were only slowly beginning to regain the ability to move.

They did not know what to do next, but they realized that they could no longer raise the weapons in their hands.

.....

.....

.....

.....

One division of Orthodoxy cavalry was in front of the Mausoleum of Books.

One division of Orthodoxy cavalry was at the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education.

One division of the Orthodoxy cavalry was at the Heavenly Dao Academy.

But the Li Palace's strongest force was elsewhere.

The inexplicable fall of snow made the Road of Peace as chilly as

the tense situation taking place.

Daoist Siyuan's left hand rested on his chest, lightly clenched, like he was playing with a walnut.

What was actually in his hand was a treasure of the Orthodoxy: the Universe Stamp.

Hu Thirty-Two stood next to him and half a step behind. His head was slightly lowered while his hands were buried in his sleeves. He looked like an inconspicuous shopkeeper.

No one knew that his left hand gripped the Falling Star Stone while his right hand held an ordinary and unremarkable dagger.

Similarly, no one knew if it was the divine strength of the Falling Star Stone that was more powerful or the dagger that was more frightening.

A vast crowd of people stood behind the two Prefects of the Orthodoxy.

A hint of bright and striking red occasionally appearing in the dense crowd of people made it seem even more wicked.

Two hundred and seventeen bishops and deacons of the Star Condensation Realm.

Sixteen cardinals of terrifying cultivation level.

They stood on the Road of Peace.

Surrounding the Prince of Xiang's estate.

The other ten-some princely estates and the Tianhai estate were deathly silent.

Let alone the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets, even the Great Zhou Imperial Court would find it hard to gather so many cultivators of this level.

This was the Li Palace's strength. It was usually concealed, but once it appeared, everything in the world had to fall silent out of

respect.

Chapter 1090 – [A Goose's Footprint in the Melting Snow](#)

Snow was drifting down over the capital, and the Road of Peace was no exception.

Only a few people knew that these drifting snowflakes came from a furious snowstorm falling over the Heavenly Dao Academy.

All the princely estates had shut their gates, making not a single noise. The Prince of Xiang's estate was even more quiet, so silent that it seemed like a tomb.

The snowflakes flew past the high walls of the princely estate, landing where the Li Palace priests could not see, but they could not land on the ground.

Countless gusts of wind behind the wall incessantly blew against the soft snow.

Several hundred cultivators and divine crossbowmen stood in the garden and courtyard of the Prince of Xiang's estate, separated by the black sea of priests by only a single wall.

They made not a single sound, maintaining absolute silence. As a result, their breathing sounded even louder.

The louder it was, the heavier it was. The shorter it was, the more nervous it was.

Was the light snow of early spring unable to fall because of this breathing that was as silent as a mystery, as heavy as a mountain?

Prince Chen Liu stood by the window, gazing at his subordinates in the garden as he silently pondered these questions.

As snow danced outside his window, his face seemed a little pale.

Because he was tired, not because he was uneasy.

At this moment, any regrets were unnecessary.

He turned to the blue-clothed Daoists.

Three Daoists in blue turned toward that white-haired old Daoist.

The old Daoist was a true expert of the Daoist faith and had been half a step from the Divine for many years.

Other than the Tang clan's Minister Wei, the blind zither player, and a few hidden characters belonging to the southern clans and sects, there was no one else that could be placed on par with him.

But even he did not have the confidence to defend the Prince of Xiang's estate.

Not a single shred.

He completely understood that if the Li Palace decided to attack with all its power, only the complete mobilization of the Great Zhou Imperial Court's army could stop that raging wave.

The old Daoist said to Prince Chen Liu, "You should go."

Prince Chen Liu paled even further, but his expression remained calm. "I cannot abandon these subordinates loyal to me and my father."

The old Daoist impassively said, "I will remain to block the way. You leave first with my three martial nephews."

Prince Chen Liu froze, not having expected the old Daoist to be willing to take such a risk.

The old Daoist walked up to the window. Ignoring the prince, he slowly closed his eyes.

The wind brought snowflakes to that wrinkled face and ruffled his white hair. It was a rather touching sight.

Prince Chen Liu's eyes went moist at this sight. He wanted to persuade him otherwise, but he ultimately chose to remain silent.

He used as little time as possible to regain his composure. After

bowing to the old Daoist, he immediately turned around.

The gray bricks from the window to the center of the reception hall began to sink down, forming a flight of stone steps leading underground.

Prince Chen Liu and the three blue-clothed Daoists headed down the steps.

In front of them was a gloom that headed to parts unknown.

Suddenly, the lanterns on the stone walls lit up on their own, their fire illuminating the ground in front of the group.

It was rather wet, and moss was growing along the corners of the walls. The place had not been cleaned in many years.

The light also shone on Prince Chen Liu's face.

He was very calm.

There was no moisture in his eyes.

His face showed no signs of being touched.

All of that was meaningless.

He had always believed this.

The battle about to begin was also meaningless.

The old Daoist from the Monastery of Eternal Spring might be able to escape with his life, or he might die a valiant death in battle, but it had nothing to do with him.

He only needed to know that the old Daoist would assuredly make the experts of the Li Palace pay an enormous price.

As for whether the soldiers and experts of the princely estate surrendered or died in battle, that also did not matter.

He had never once doubted the loyalty or ardor of these people, but these people had never been the true aces of the Prince of Xiang's estate.

The Prince of Xiang's estate's true strength would not even appear in the capital today.

Because he had made an almost identical judgment to Chen Changsheng's. He did not think that a fight would start in the Mausoleum of Books.

Though the moment of the final battle had still not come, many people would still die today.

He had to ensure that his own life would remain unthreatened, so he had to leave.

He would use this gloomy tunnel to reach the shore of the Luo River and then leave the capital.

Several hundred black-armored light cavalry had been waiting on the outskirts of the capital for him for a very long time.

He would take this light cavalry and travel to Hanqiu City, where he would meet up with his most loyal subordinates, troops, and the Zhu clan's descendants.

When that time came, what should he do? Issue an official denunciation? Or should he first poison to death those pieces of trash in the Zhu clan?

If it were Emperor Taizong, what would he do?

Poisoning was no good, as it was too obvious. House arrest was better, and he could revisit the matter after he took the throne.

A hint of laughter appeared in his eyes, shining in the lantern light, as he thought of these things.

The three Daoists were behind him, so they naturally couldn't see.

His father was an expert of the Divine Domain, so there was naturally no need to worry about his safety.

Even if the venerable Daoist happened to lose, neither Xu Yourong nor Chen Changsheng were that vicious, so they naturally

wouldn't do anything to the princely estate's concubines and their children.

Prince Chen Liu felt like he had thought of everything, considered everything, calculated everything.

But he did not think about his new wife, the Princess of Ping, or even about this current undertaking.

He also had not calculated that someone was waiting for him up ahead in this gloomy tunnel.

.....

.....

In the quiet tunnel, any sound could be heard loud and clear.

Like the water moving underground or ants climbing on the wall.

The two Daoist nuns opened their eyes.

Footsteps were coming from in front of them, from the direction of the Prince of Xiang's estate.

Huai Shu glanced at her senior sister.

Huai Ren had an apathetic gaze.

Suddenly, the faint light coming from in front of them refracted in a strange manner.

It was like space was being twisted there.

What sort of strength could cause the space to silently warp?

Huai Shu sensed this Qi and asked in consternation, "What object is this?"

Huai Ren slightly raised her brow and said in surprise, "His Holiness the Pope has also moved?"

.....

.....

When the space in the tunnel was twisting, a similar

phenomenon was taking place in the sky.

The gloomy light of the sun shone everywhere, clearly illuminating the Prince of Xiang's estate.

A pressure difficult to describe descended from the sky.

The snow and wind suddenly went mad.

A black dragon claw tore through the clouds and slowly descended.

The dragon claw was like a black mountain, its scales like dark windows exuding a monstrous Qi.

The soldiers and experts could not remain calm, and began to shout in panic.

The white-haired old Daoist opened his eyes, from which a stream of light shot out.

This pure light enveloped the Prince of Xiang's estate. It was a formidable defensive array.

The old Daoist looked at the sky and coldly said, "Evil creature, die!"

Before his words had time to fall, his sword had left its sheath. It drew a harsh ray of light against the sky as it flew up, piercing through the thick clouds to slash at his foe!

He knew that his opponent today was very strong, but he remained fearless.

This strike of his condensed all his cultivation over his life, being infinitesimally close to the Divine Domain, and was bolstered by the estate's array. As long as his opponent was still not an adult, she would undoubtedly be injured and forced to retreat.

But he had no idea that his true opponent was not in the depths of the snowstorm. They had always been in the Prince of Xiang's estate.

When he was putting his heart and soul into that sword strike, that person struck.

That person stood in the corner of the wall, his shoulders drooped, an ordinary sword loosely tied to his waist.

At some point, his slender fingers had grasped the hilt, seeming both steady and in harmony.

If someone had seen this, they might have even developed a misperception.

His sword and hand were one.

How could there possibly be a sword faster than this?

A sword glow flashed and then vanished.

It was like a firework, or a flower blooming in the night.

Two holes appeared in two walls.

The tip of a sword, covered in blood, pierced through a blue Daoist robe.

This is a Chinese idiom that is either used to refer to the vestiges left behind by events from the past or to the fleeting nature of human life.

Chapter 1091 – Chen Changsheng's Arrangements

Boom!

Everyone in the city could hear it.

The dust accumulated over many years dropped down from the roof beams.

The crowds on the streets were perplexed as to what had happened.

The officials of the court who had just received news from the south wondered in shock, has another mountain collapsed?

The thunderous boom gradually faded into the distance.

The massive dragon claw slowly drew back into the clouds.

The array over the Prince of Xiang's estate had been shattered. Though the estate had not been turned into ruins, it was not far from it.

The wooden bridge had been shattered, and ruined evening pavilions were tilting into the lake. The waters of the lake sloshed against the shores, turning the yellow sands of the horse track into a muddy slurry.

Dust rose all around the estate, as did screams. Dazzling stains of blood could be seen speckling the white walls and their red tiles.

The orderly and muffled steps of the Li Palace priests could be heard from the other side of the broken walls, and the situation soon fell into even greater disorder.

The reception hall deep within the estate was a little quieter, and the building here was also relatively intact, but two holes had appeared at one of its corners.

Suddenly, a dazzling ray of light, just like a sword, shot out of

those two holes.

The hard bricks of the wall were torn apart like paper.

The walls making up this corner and the roof above it neatly fell down.

Clinkclinkclinkclink!

In a series of bright shattering sounds, those timeworn tiles and beast sculptures broke into pieces.

Careful examination would reveal that straight line amongst the shards and the flat edges shining like gold.

The corner of the wall had vanished, so that person was naturally revealed.

The old Daoist squinted, wanting to confirm the identity of his assailant.

This person was dressed in blue, but it would not make one think of the blue gown of a youth, only make one feel that he was a servant.

It was absolutely impossible for him to be a servant.

The old Daoist quickly realized who he was.

Other than that person, who else in the world could find such a superb moment to strike?

Whose sword could be so fast and so vicious that it could slay him in a single strike?

The old Daoist sighed, "I didn't expect you to already be half a step from the Divine."

The blue-clothed servant was Liu Qing.

With Su Li and that mysterious individual gone, he was the most frightening assassin in the world.

And only he would still insist on working in the shadows, even when he was half a step from the Divine.

Liu Qing did not respond.

This was out of caution, and it was also a habit from his line of work.

The old Daoist arched his brows in displeasure.

And then, his brow split.

A wound appeared in the center of his left brow.

It was a wound so fine and slender that it seemed rather elegant.

If it had been made by a sword, then this sword had been so finely controlled that it was almost godlike.

Blood began to seep out of this fine wound.

The old Daoist sighed, then sat against the wall.

More and more blood began to rush out of the wound, gurgling out.

Liu Qing did not look. He kept his gaze fixed on the old Daoist's hands.

He had been doing so from the moment he had appeared.

The old Daoist's hands were not holding a sword.

That sword had disappeared into the sky.

But he did not relax his guard.

Because the old Daoist had maintained his illusory grasp on the sword.

Now, the old Daoist finally loosened his grip.

After holding his breath for a very long time, he finally gave one last exhalation.

This breath was as hot as lava, scalding magma that instantly vaporized the falling snow into steam.

There was a sloshing sound.

His gaze moved upward, resting on the old Daoist's face for a few moments.

The old Daoist had already shut his eyes, and he was no longer breathing.

Liu Qing finally relaxed, but there was no joy on his face, only a pale complexion.

To kill the old Daoist, he had suffered heavy internal injuries.

.....

.....

Without any array or a true expert like the old Daoist, the Prince of Xiang's estate only managed to put up a brief resistance before the might of the Li Palace.

The Li Palace quickly seized the entire estate, as well as the two neighboring estates.

Hu Thirty-Two ordered his subordinates, "Don't alarm the women in the rear courtyard."

The Orthodoxy had finally attacked the Imperial clan. No matter what happened afterward, it was now time to reap sufficient rewards. The Li Palace had to acquire several ledgers and a few hidden objects. How to deal with the people within this princely estate was another matter entirely.

Bishops from the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green and bishops from the Li Palace specializing in divine arts were currently treating the wounded.

A flash of Sacred Light would occasionally rise from the ruins, followed by chanting.

Even the wounded from the Prince of Xiang's estate would be treated. Of course, they were put behind the priests of the Li Palace.

Daoist Siyuan slightly frowned as his right hand rubbed his

slightly bulging belt.

He deeply disapproved of this way of doing things, but this was the Pope's order.

The bottle of Cinnabar Pills in his belt had been personally given to him by the Pope.

Even if there were people that could not be saved with the Sacred Light technique, this bottle of Cinnabar Pills would probably make it very difficult to die.

Of course, those who were already dead could not be brought back to life.

Daoist Siyuan looked at the old Daoist by the broken wall, a mixture of emotions in his eyes.

The old Daoist was thin and short. His white hair was in a mess and his body was covered in blood.

The most powerful person seemed very weak once they were dead.

He knew of this old Daoist's background and identity.

This old Daoist was the individual that he and Linghai Zhiwang had most feared before the start of this undertaking.

In the last few years, the Hall of Heavenly Judgment had sent many people to Luoyang to keep watch on the Monastery of Eternal Spring, especially on this old Daoist.

The moment the old Daoist left Luoyang, he and Linghai Zhiwang had found out and reported the matter to Chen Changsheng the same night.

Chen Changsheng had been practicing the sword in the stone room at the time and expressed no opinion.

It was only today that Daoist Siyuan learned that the Pope had made arrangements for this a long time ago.

His gaze fell on the old Daoist's severed brow.

There was still some sword intent there.

This sword intent was like a willow catkin about to break. It was extremely fine and clear.

A gust of cold wind caused a biting sensation to appear.

Just how frightening was an assassin that could kill this old Daoist?

His brows perked as he thought of that blue figure he had spied earlier in the snow. Just what is the relationship between His Holiness and Liu Qing?

At this moment, three people abruptly appeared in the ruins.

Daoist Siyuan was not shocked, nor did he appear wary. He had clearly known in advance of that tunnel in the reception hall.

He bowed to the two Daoist nuns and said, "I have seen my two seniors."

Huai Shu sternly said, "Since you've moved, why did you not tell the Holy Maiden beforehand?"

This straightforward nun of irascible temperament was clearly in a foul mood.

If Daoist Siyuan had not been a Prefect of the Orthodoxy leading one of the Sacred Halls, she might have shown even more anger.

Daoist Siyuan bitterly smiled. "I also only knew of His Holiness's arrangements just before coming."

Huai Shu was dumbstruck by these words while Huai Ren also appeared rather surprised.

Daoist Siyuan knew that this matter was very hard to clearly explain. He said no more and looked to another person.

Even with the help of three Daoists from the Monastery of Eternal Spring, Prince Chen Liu had still failed to reach the Luo

River, and Hanqiu City was still a thousand li away.

His face was rather pale and a few bloodstains could be seen on his body, but his expression retained its habitual calm.

Daoist Siyuan found this rather admirable, and then he felt that the Pope's arrangements might be inappropriate.

Chapter 1092 – The Prerequisite of All Things

A breeze blew through the ruins, ruffling sleeves and gradually stirring up a killing intent.

Other people might not be able to sense it, but Prince Chen Liu could clearly perceive it.

He stared into Daoist Siyuan's eyes and clearly enunciated each of his words. "Chen Changsheng will not kill me."

Huai Shu stared blankly at him before understanding what he meant. She subconsciously wanted to stop this, but she realized that her senior sister had not said anything.

Huai Ren was looking toward the southern part of the capital, lost in thought and paying no attention to what was about to occur.

At this moment, a dagger happened to appear outside the reception hall, breaking that breeze and that possibility.

By the time Daoist Siyuan looked over, the dagger had returned to its owner's sleeve.

Hu Thirty-Two had finished searching the estate.

Daoist Siyuan expressionlessly said, "At times, mercy is idiocy."

Hu Thirty-Two meekly said, "Since this is His Holiness's will, mistakes are also correct and idiocy might only be because of us."

It sounded rather awkward, but the meaning was extremely simple.

Even if the Pope was wrong, he was still right.

If the Pope really was wrong? Then please consult the sentence above.

Daoist Siyuan looked away from Prince Chen Liu, and his sleeve

also stopped fluttering in the breeze.

Hu Thirty-Two gave a simple explanation of the current situation.

From the moment Mount Mo collapsed to when the Li Palace priests seized the Road of Peace, many events had taken place around the capital, but only a short time had passed.

The sides at the Mausoleum of Books were still in a stalemate. Even when confronting a true legend, Xu Yourong still had no intention of backing down.

Huai Ren and Huai Shu had entered the tunnel in the early morning, so they had no idea what had happened over at the Mausoleum of Books.

When they learned that Wang Zhice had appeared, they were naturally quite shocked.

"Why would Lord Wang..."

Huai Shu was nervous and anxious, finding it impossible to continue.

Huai Ren thought, no wonder something seemed strange over at the south. After muttering to herself for a time, she declared, "We are going to the Mausoleum of Books to take a look."

Huai Shu's voice shook as she said, "But this is Lord Wang."

Huai Ren calmly said, "Even Lord Wang cannot recklessly order around Holy Maiden Peak."

After saying this, she brought Huai Shu out of the Prince of Xiang's estate and toward the Mausoleum of Books.

Her ability to make such a determined choice at this moment made the Li Palace priests feel even more respect toward Huai Ren and Holy Maiden Peak.

Daoist Siyuan ignored these things. He turned once more to Prince Chen Liu and said, "If there's a chance, I will still kill you

today."

Hu Thirty-Two felt helpless as he listened, but he couldn't do anything, because Daoist Siyuan had only said he would do it if he had a chance.

Prince Chen Liu asked, "You really want to kill me?"

Daoist Siyuan said, "I've wanted to kill you starting from many years ago, because I already knew back then that you would be trouble."

At that time, he had still been a young man praised by both the Tianhai Divine Empress and the Pope, and had just become an archbishop.

Prince Chen Liu, on the other hand, had been the only representative of the Chen Imperial clan left in the capital, holding a special place in the hearts of the commoners and officials.

Prince Chen Liu said, "It really is as Mo Yu said. You really do have an extremely violent personality."

Daoist Siyuan noted, "Why bring up my relationship with her? Let alone you, I even once wanted to kill His Holiness."

Prince Chen Liu knew what he was referring to.

Back when the Orthodox Academy was besieged and in the events that followed, Daoist Siyuan was a frequent sight.

Perhaps he would be drinking tea in that tea house in Hundred Flowers Lane, or perhaps he would be standing in the darkness, staring at those walls covered in ivy.

At the time, Prince Chen Liu had been standing across from him, and what he had wanted to do was to protect Chen Changsheng.

Now, however, the situation had been reversed.

Hu Thirty-Two brought Prince Chen Liu out of the estate.

Prince Chen Liu was silent as he gazed at the ruined courtyard

and the fallen corpses.

He did not know where the Li Palace planned to imprison him or whether Daoist Siyuan would attempt to find a chance to assassinate him. Neither did he know if he should pray for Chen Changsheng's victory or Shang Xingzhou's.

If it was out of concern for his life, he naturally preferred the former.

But that was not how he wanted the story to end.

He only knew that whether Shang Xingzhou won or Chen Changsheng won, he and his father had already lost.

Under the prerequisite that they had not truly made their move.

Perhaps it was precisely because he and his father had not truly prepared to move that they had lost so cleanly.

It now seemed that he, his father, the other princes of the Chen clan, and even Shang Xingzhou had underestimated Chen Changsheng's daring.

But supreme power had always been the most corrosive of poisons. Who could resist that allure?

.....

.....

No snow was falling over the Li Palace, but it still seemed very cold. Perhaps it was because it was too empty.

Only two people were present on the vast plaza.

Daoist Wu sat on the cold stones, his hair a mess and his belt drenched in blood. He looked absolutely miserable.

He was extremely angry at the moment and wanted nothing more than to curse eighteen generations of Chen Changsheng's ancestors, caring not that there might be emperors among them.

But he did not dare do this, because a woman dressed in white

was standing behind him.

An Hua's delicate face was fraught with tension.

She gripped a dagger and stared only at the back of Daoist Wu's neck.

When the Pope left, he had ordered very clearly that if anything changed, she needed to kill this old man the first moment she could.

The two archbishops had also instructed her very well: in order to kill someone, it was best to cut off their head.

.....

.....

Chen Changsheng walked out of the Li Palace.

The teachers and examinees participating in the Grand Examination were all in the Green Leaf World.

The crowd that had come to see the spectacle had dispersed, leaving the stone pillars alone in silence.

He thought that he was going alone to confront the world, so he couldn't help but feel a little lonely.

But just when he was prepared to sigh, he saw Tang Thirty-Six.

This made him feel rather surprised and somewhat awkward.

Tang Thirty-Six said, "Since you could write a letter to Guan Bai beforehand, you could also have told me."

His voice was very calm when he said this, but anyone could hear the anger inside.

Chen Changsheng replied, "I know the Tang clan's style of doing things. Once they strike, they will leave no path of retreat, so I didn't want to involve you."

Tang Thirty-Six said, "Since you want to move, you have to move with a thunderous momentum. Do you not agree with the Holy

Maiden's method?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "Yourong's method is already the best method in this sort of situation."

To use the future of humanity to threaten someone like Shang Xingzhou seemed like a naive, childish, absurd, and laughable idea, but it was actually not.

Because Shang Xingzhou understood that naivete often symbolized absolute cruelty and callousness.

If Wang Zhice had not suddenly appeared today, Xu Yourong really might have succeeded.

Tang Thirty-Six asked, "What are you prepared to do?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "In terms of both cultivation and wisdom, I'm far inferior to Yourong, but at times, I'm still more naive."

Even at a tense moment like this, Tang Thirty-Six still couldn't help but want to tease Chen Changsheng.

But he did not do this, because he vaguely guessed at what Chen Changsheng wanted to express.

The more naive one was, the crueller they were; was this what he meant?

Chen Changsheng knew what he was worried about. After patting him on the shoulder, he began to walk south.

Tang Thirty-Six stood dumbstruck. Only after a while did he come to his senses and run after him.

Chapter 1093 – Her Name

Across several hundred years, this was the day in which the most Red Geese appeared in the capital.

A Red Goose would occasionally fly across the sky, leaving a trail in its wake.

A stream of shocking news followed these trails to various places.

The Heavenly Dao Academy, the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education, the Prince of Xiang's estate...

Those trails revealed the Li Palace's formidable and callous will, expressed the stance of the young Pope.

Suddenly, the Red Geese scattered in a chorus of frightened cries.

The sky suddenly dimmed.

The people on the streets looked up and saw a massive shadow obscuring the sky.

The clouds roiled like raging waves as the shadow revealed its true body.

A black mountain ten-some li in length appeared in the sky.

The occasional ray of sunlight would be brightly reflected off the black mountains, as if they were bright mirrors.

The weather went cold and snowflakes began to fall. The capital seemed to have returned to winter.

This sight made the people recall the dread their ancestors had felt when they were dominated by dragons, and fear overcame them.

.....

.....

The massive shadow drifted toward the Mausoleum of Books. It seemed slow, but it was actually traveling very fast.

The river around the Mausoleum of Books deepened in hue, giving off a much colder feeling.

The shadow did not continue to encroach upon the Mausoleum of Books through the main gate, nor did it use the southern gate. Instead, it passed over the river, that green orange grove, and the small courtyard that once had dried meat hanging from its roof beam. Finally, it crossed the shallow canals, ultimately shrouding all of the Mausoleum of Books.

Underneath the shadow was a person.

He had delicate features and clean eyes. He seemed extremely clean and fresh.

He wore the Divine Robe and held the Divine Staff. He exuded an aura of absolute divinity.

He was the manifestation of conviction, the supreme good who walked the mortal realm. He was the current Pope.

Very few people had ever seen Chen Changsheng like this.

The girls of South Stream Temple gaped in shock.

Xu Yourong slightly tilted her head and sized him up, the hint of a smile in her clean and cold eyes.

.....

.....

Shang Xingzhou turned to face Chen Changsheng.

His gaze pierced through the countless sword intents of the South Stream Temple sword array, itself seeming to be sharp and awe-inspiring to the extreme.

But he had finally looked at Chen Changsheng.

On that year, as Chen Changsheng carried the Tianhai Divine Empress down from the Mausoleum of Books and he walked up to the peak, they had passed each other, each of them looking straight

ahead.

Later on, he never again looked at his disciple, not even when they worked together in White Emperor City, not even when they had talked with each other three years ago in the Orthodox Academy. He had not truly been looking at him, instead indifferently regarding him from on high.

Today was the first time he was looking straight at Chen Changsheng.

His eyes were deep and obscured. Like that mountain within the Cloud Grave, it was simply impossible to see what they were really like.

But there was still an occasional ray of sunlight.

This was an expression of admiration.

And this was also the first time.

He felt that Chen Changsheng's performance today was quite excellent.

Just when a problem had occurred at the Mausoleum of Books, the Li Palace had unleashed a thunderous blow and swiftly taken control of the capital.

The moment he chose and the toughness of his methods all showed that Chen Changsheng had truly matured.

From a certain perspective, one could even smell a hint of ruthlessness on him today.

These matters looked simple, but they were actually very difficult to pull off.

Chen Changsheng had spent these days in silence, seemingly uninvolved, but nobody would truly believe that he would do nothing.

Many eyes had been keeping an ever-present watch on the Li Palace.

Shang Xingzhou had always been looking at him.

Wang Zhice had also been looking.

Daoist Wu had been their eyes.

But Chen Changsheng had succeeded in hiding everything from them. From the situation, it seemed that even Xu Yourong had not known what he was thinking.

.....

.....

When Shang Xingzhou was looking at Chen Changsheng and showing admiration for the first time, Wang Zhice was looking at that shadow enveloping the Mausoleum of Books.

He seemed to remember something from the past, and a nostalgic expression appeared on his face.

The shadow suddenly vanished, transforming into a sky of snow.

A black-clothed girl appeared in the snowstorm.

She had an indifferent expression and a face as beautiful as a painting. Her black dress exuded an extremely cold Qi.

Destroying Mount Mo, pacifying the princely estate, and using frost to dominate the Heavenly Dao Academy—she had played the most important role today in allowing the Li Palace to control the capital.

As a Black Frost Dragon, she might not have been mature, her Dao and soul unable to meld with the laws of the Divine Domain, but she was born with a divine attribute that disregarded the difference in levels. To put it another way, from the moment she was born, she was foreordained to become an expert of the Divine Domain.

The two old Guardians of the Tang clan and the old Daoist from the Monastery of Eternal Spring were all experts half a step from the Divine, but in terms of pure fighting power, they were still

inferior to a high-class divine being like her. As for destructive power, there was no one on the continent that could compare to her, not even if Xu Yourong or Qiushan Jun completed their third awakenings.

Dragons had always been the most terrifying existences. Otherwise, Emperor Taizong and the Divine experts that he led would not have paid such an enormous price to force them to make an oath to the starry skies and sign that agreement, making them promise that they would never make landfall on the continent.

But that agreement did not include her name.

Because she had been imprisoned under New North Bridge at the time, and she had still been very young, so young that she did not even know the short form of her name.

The one who had imprisoned her beneath New North Bridge was Wang Zhice.

.....

.....

"Zhusha, long time no see."

Wang Zhice smiled at the girl in black.

Zhusha was her short name, or perhaps it was better to call it her human name.

Even this name had been given by Wang Zhice, further reinforced into a habit by Qin Zhong and the others.

As she heard these words and saw that middle-aged scholar on which time seemed to have no effect, the black-clothed girl suddenly went pale.

She had imagined meeting this person many times, resentfully plotting her revenge.

But she had not imagined that meeting him again after several centuries would still fill her with fear.

She had been imprisoned underground by him for several hundred years, and he had even given her a name...

Those memories had truly been engraved on her bones. They were impossible to forget, and sent chills through her body.

Even she felt very cold, very afraid.

Her body began to tremble, the fragments of ice on her black dress clattering against each other.

At this moment, she looked like a lonely little girl.

She could destroy a mountain, pacify an estate, reverse the situation of the entire capital.

But Wang Zhice had only needed to say 'long time no see' to send dread coursing through her body and deprive her of any strength to fight.

The river of time incessantly battered against its shores and dug down, digging so deep that the bottom could not be seen and it became an abyss.

A person like Wang Zhice could truly only be described as unfathomable as an abyss.

Chen Changsheng walked in front of the girl and blocked Wang Zhice's gaze.

Wang Zhice quietly looked at him, his eyes still unfathomable as an abyss.

Chen Changsheng solemnly said, "She is not called Zhusha."

Wang Zhice calmly replied, "I do not think so."

Xu Yourong walked down and said to him, "Which is why I say that you've gone senile."

Chapter 1094 – Why Don't You Die?

Earlier, Xu Yourong had wondered aloud whether Wang Zhice had gone senile.

At the time, her words had triggered an uproar both within and without the Mausoleum of Books. Even the southern cultivators who followed her were rather dissatisfied.

She made this comment again, but she was greeted this time by silence.

The situation had undergone a massive transformation. Everyone could hear that her comment now was just helping out Chen Changsheng.

After Chen Changsheng appeared, Wang Zhice had not spoken with him, but decided to chat with Zhusha.

'Long time no see' contained far too many meanings.

In terms of attitude, it was as lofty as Mount Han.

In terms of psychological attack, it was utterly untraceable.

Anyone would find it very difficult to cope with this move.

Chen Changsheng had chosen to cut it off at the source.

He stood in front of the girl in black and told Wang Zhice that this was not her name.

She could be called Hongzhuang, could be called Zhizhi, or could even be called that dragon name which would require several thousand syllables when transliterated into human language.

In short, she was not called Zhusha.

Even if she had once gone by that name.

That was then, and this was now.

She was not under New North Bridge, but by his side.

Silence reigned inside and outside the Mausoleum of Books.

Xu Yourong's discourtesy toward Wang Zhice was not too much in conflict with the impression she had left on the common people ten-some years ago.

But Chen Changsheng's unflinching stance toward Wang Zhice had caught many people by surprise.

Why?

In Mount Han, Chen Changsheng had seen Wang Zhice walk on clouds. It was like he had seen a cultivator of the starry sky for the first time.

Just like the vast majority of people in the world, he also regarded Wang Zhice as an idol.

Today, Wang Zhice was standing across from him and Xu Yourong, but his respect for this legend had still not lessened.

Until Wang Zhice had said those words.

The little Black Dragon began to feel fear.

As he saw her pale face and Wang Zhice's faint smile, Chen Changsheng suddenly felt angry.

He found it impossible to pinpoint what exactly this emotion was, but it made him feel angry.

In an extremely short amount of time, much of the respect in his heart had vanished, and his mind had cooled.

As for Xu Yourong, it could be seen from her attitude to Wang Zhice that she respected nothing other than the Great Dao.

Just like that, the pressure created from Wang Zhice's single comment had been stopped by two statements from Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong.

Wang Zhice faintly smiled and prepared to say something more.

But Chen Changsheng was looking elsewhere.

The words Wang Zhice had wanted to say were not able to leave his mouth.

His expression became more focused.

Chen Changsheng was not looking at his master, but at Xu Yourong.

By just quietly gazing at each other, they were able to understand what the other was thinking.

Their hearts had always been naturally linked, like a rainbow connecting two lands.

The swords also struck out like a rainbow.

On Holy Maiden Peak, their swords combined in harmony had once given birth to a rainbow.

Chen Changsheng said, "I know that you went to the Hundred Herb Garden. I also went."

Xu Yourong said, "When I was little, Empress once taught me that one had to calm their mind before a great undertaking. I only want to calm myself."

Chen Changsheng said, "I don't want to become like my master, and I also don't want you to become like the Empress."

At these words, Wang Zhice and the disciples of South Stream Temple looked toward Shang Xingzhou within the sword array.

Shang Xingzhou was looking up at the overcast sky with an indifferent expression. It was impossible to tell what he was thinking, but he was clearly paying no attention to anyone else.

Xu Yourong replied, "Perhaps you did not consider that I want to become like the Empress."

Chen Changsheng looked at her and sincerely returned, "No, because I know that you don't like that sort of life."

He knew that she liked to look over cliffs, enjoy the snow, listen

to the rain, pick herbs, and read.

Xu Yourong smiled and sighed, "I know that you also don't delight in this sort of life."

She knew that as a child, he had grown accustomed to watching the temple, sweeping the snow, sheltering from the rain, eating medicine, and reading.

As for intrigue, deception, callous slaughter, cold-blooded threats...

Neither of them liked to engage in these things, but in the current situation, they were forced to.

And they understood each other too deeply, knew that they didn't like to do such things, so they wanted to do it themselves.

Xu Yourong had struck first and Chen Changsheng had struck after.

One sword struck east and one sword west.

They had no desire to strike with their swords, but they had the heart.

They had not intentionally worked together, but in the end, they had ended up walking together.

Only a true harmony of swords could give rise to this silent understanding, and make their actions seem so wondrous that the heavens seemed to have planned it.

Xu Yourong had held Shang Xingzhou in the Mausoleum of Books and drawn the attention of the princes.

Chen Changsheng had brought the strength of the Li Palace to sweep through the world like a flood.

The final result was perfect.

The Orthodoxy's conservative faction had been purged and the capital was completely under control. A decree from the palace

would be all it took for Shang Xingzhou to truly lose.

Xu Yourong did not need to become the second Tianhai Divine Empress and Chen Changsheng did not need to go against his heart and slaughter the four directions.

...If Wang Zhice had not appeared.

Chen Changsheng turned to Wang Zhice and said, "I had always hoped that I would not see Sir here."

Wang Zhice replied, "I had also hoped that I would not see you here."

Chen Changsheng asked, "I am the Pope, so there's no reason for me not to appear, but what of Sir?"

Wang Zhice answered, "For the sake of all living beings of the world, I had to come."

Chen Changsheng believed in these words.

He had met the Tang Old Master in Wenshui City and knew that this was how these elders truly thought.

The elders of Taizong's era were all true idealists. For their goal, their righteous cause, for all living beings of the world, these people could sacrifice so much, like the little Black Dragon, or reputation, or the lives of countless people, and perhaps even more important things.

Chen Changsheng really wanted to say that it was wrong to do this, but he knew that such words would be meaningless.

He said to Wang Zhice, "It seems that we at least agree on one thing: the living beings of the world are the most important."

Wang Zhice agreed, "Yes, even though they are not aware of this."

Chen Changsheng noted, "So that all living beings will not suffer the fires of war, will not endure the bitterness of being adrift and homeless, Sir was willing to cross vast distances to persuade us to

yield."

Wang Zhice replied, "Correct."

Chen Changsheng asked, "Then why can it not be your side that yields?"

This was a very good question.

Shang Xingzhou looked up at the distant sky, an ambiguous smile on his face.

Wang Zhice fell into deep thought.

If one said that leading the Human race forward required a valiant will and daring, as well as an outstanding ability to execute...

Then Xu Yourong's and Chen Changsheng's deeds today had proved that they were outstanding leaders.

Shang Xingzhou had conceded this point, so Wang Zhice also had to concede it.

The current danger arose from the stalemate between the two sides.

The slightest lack of caution would result in three months of continuous war, and the good ending for the Human race would be utterly annihilated.

Those princes and the experts of the Imperial Court all entered the Mausoleum of Books.

The experts of the southern sects walked out from the forest.

Wang Po had also come. He hugged his blade as he stood in the distance.

Several determined or angry voices could be heard.

Chen Changsheng did not earnestly listen, but some words still made their way into his ears.

'There is already no retreat. Retreat is death.'

This prompted another question from Chen Changsheng.

In the coming months and years, this question would become extremely famous.

"If the living beings of the world are truly this important, then why can't any of you die for them?"

His expression was incredibly solemn, his eyes as bright and clean as a mirror.

He was not mocking these elders, nor was he angrily criticizing them. He truly did not understand.

Wang Zhice looked into his eyes and suddenly realized that he could not answer this question.

Chapter 1095 – Let's Fight

If the question arose from anger or derision, it would be easy to answer, but Chen Changsheng had asked with sincerity.

He truly did want to know the answer.

From the moment he saw Daoist Wu in the stone chamber and knew that Wang Zhice had appeared, he began to ponder this question, but he had never been able to find an answer.

Since one side needed to yield, why couldn't it be their side?

If retreat meant falling into the abyss and death, then why couldn't they be the ones to die?

Why could these idealists who were willing to lose their heads and spill their blood for the sake of all living beings not make this choice?

Wang Zhice did not know how he should answer.

In his long life, he had never believed himself to have accomplished nothing. He had made many contributions, done many things for the Human race.

And he believed that he held a great compassion for this world.

So whenever he turned to look back on the past, he did not feel any remorse or shame, only serenity and self-confidence.

Only today, upon hearing this question, did he realize that this had just been wind blowing across the hard dumpling skin, that none of the true flavor had been boiled out from within.

.....

.....

Wang Zhice had found himself unable to answer Chen Changsheng's question because he knew that this was a real question.

Others did not know that this was an actual question, so they naturally believed that Chen Changsheng was shaming Wang Zhice.

Angry retorts and sharp criticisms rose one after the other.

"Then why don't you die?"

"Your Holiness, you can also die!"

"Can you and the Holy Maiden combined be more important than the venerable Daoist? Be more important than Lord Wang?"

From a realistic perspective, these criticisms were very reasonable.

Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong were both extremely talented, but they were still very young and still needed a great deal of time to enter the Divine Domain.

Shang Xingzhou and Wang Zhice, on the other hand, were legendary experts with long-established reputations.

If the humans wanted to defeat the demons, the latter pair were more important.

"My words have only to do with reason, not with strong or weak, or else Zhou Dufu would not have died back then."

Chen Changsheng's comment caused the crowd to gradually fall silent.

Until today, the entire continent could not be sure whether Zhou Dufu was dead or alive, but countless theories had circulated around the continent over the centuries.

Those rumors often involved Wang Zhice, and they were all extremely dark.

Wang Zhice seemed to think of something, and his expression slightly darkened.

Chen Changsheng continued, "Some people believe that all the

living beings of the world are important and are worth the sacrifice of countless people, and then they come to demand this of me, which brings me to my question. As for myself, I do not believe this is right, so I naturally don't need to answer this question."

He was both responding to the criticisms and speaking so that Wang Zhice could hear.

Wang Zhice was quiet for a very long time and finally gave a rueful sigh. "In the end, it's just out of selfishness."

Everyone fell silent.

After some time, Chen Changsheng said, "So it was really just selfishness."

Xu Yourong calmly looked at him, knowing that he was deeply anguished.

This was not the answer that Chen Changsheng wanted, even though he already knew this might be the answer before he had even asked the question.

From the Hundred Herb Garden to the Mausoleum of Books, the characters on stage were constantly changing, but the plays being staged were still those trite and banal plots.

There had never been anything new beneath the starry sky.

But how would the story end this time?

If... alas, there was no 'if'.

After several hundred years, Wang Zhice had once more appeared before the people of the world.

How many people would still be willing to support Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong?

The experts from the south were quiet, while the Mutuo clan's Old Lady and the head of the Wu clan seemed to have disappeared.

How many of those Li Palace priests and Orthodoxy cavalry so loyal to Chen Changsheng would still have the courage to raise their weapons once they knew that they were fighting Wang Zhice?

The Prince of Zhongshan snorted, displeasure appearing on his face, but the other princes, ministers, and several Divine Generals were clearly rather relieved.

In their view, the outcome today was already obvious.

At this moment, several youths walked into the Mausoleum of Books.

They came to the front of the Divine Path, met up with the Sword Hall elders, and then stood behind Xu Yourong.

There was no hesitation in the entire process, no discussion. Both movement and expression were extremely natural.

Xu Yourong faintly smiled at them.

Chen Changsheng nodded in greeting.

Wang Zhice had never met these youths, but he could guess that they were Gou Hanshi, Guan Feibai, and Bai Cai.

The Mount Li Sword Sect was the Human race's vanguard against the demons over the last several hundred years. They had a superb reputation and wielded powerful influence.

Wang Zhice still knew of this despite living far away from society, but he did not know of the events taking place in the last few years.

When he saw the Mount Li Sword Sect so firmly standing behind Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong, he couldn't help but be a little surprised.

The experts of the southern sects, princes, and ministers were shocked, or perhaps they were uneasy.

Gou Hanshi and the others were part of the acclaimed Divine

Kingdom's Seven Laws, but they were still young. The Sword Hall elders were the true elite experts.

More importantly, their actions represented the will of the Mount Li Sword Sect Master.

The will of an expert of the Divine Domain had to be respected, even by Wang Zhice and Shang Xingzhou.

Soon after, another expert of the Divine Domain came forward.

The chilly breeze sent snow onto the pitch-black blade. The snow did not melt, but stuck to its surface.

Hugging his blade, Wang Po said, "Chen Changsheng spoke correctly. If one has to yield, it should be your side."

Even if Mao Qiuyu and Cao Yunping were present, they would have found it very difficult to endure the pressure given off by Wang Zhice.

This was also perhaps why the Mount Li Sword Sect Master had not personally appeared.

But Wang Po had chosen without hesitation to express his support for Chen Changsheng, and he even seemed to be revealing some of his edge.

The generation of blooming wildflowers had begun with Wang Po.

It was perhaps for this reason that the senior experts of humanity had always admired him.

Excepting Zhu Luo and Su Li.

Wang Zhice also admired Wang Po, so he was even more confused.

He asked, "Why?"

Wang Po replied, "Because he is younger than you."

Wang Zhice arched his brows. "Younger?"

"To be young is to be correct."

Wang Po added, "To put it another way, when people get old, they're liable to become senile."

Wang Zhice said, "Excessive thought truly does make one lose some edge, but one must be cautious when considering the overarching situation."

Wang Po said, "When my clan was being eradicated under Emperor Taizong's decree, you said nothing. Was this also for the overarching situation?"

Wang Zhice's brows rose again. He wanted to explain that Taizong was already suspicious of him back then and he had no power in the court, and... But when he saw those impoverished brows, he suddenly felt that explanations were meaningless. He could only chuckle bitterly.

At this moment, Shang Xingzhou suddenly spoke to Chen Changsheng.

"If you want to see your teacher's heart, just these words alone are not enough."

These words were somewhat incomprehensible.

But Chen Changsheng understood, because this had always been his intention.

"Yes, so I've thought of a method which will help us clearly see just what we want."

"What method?"

"None of us is willing to yield or willing to die, and we also want to prove that we're right, so let's fight a battle."

"I believed that we were fighting this entire time."

"No, there are too many people in this fight."

"Every person has their own reason to fight."

"In the end, however, this is a matter between the two of us, so why drag the entire world in?"

Chen Changsheng looked at Shang Xingzhou and sincerely said, "Master, let's fight. The loser will follow the orders of the winner."

Chapter 1096 – People Are Most Frightened to See Naivete

No one roared in laughter. In fact, nobody spoke for a long time, causing a very bizarre mood to set in.

Suddenly, a squirrel ran across a branch of a tree by the Divine Path. This drew the attention of an officer from the Imperial Guard, causing him to subconsciously release the grip on his spear. The heavy spear thumped against the foot of the comrade at his side.

"Ouch!"

The seemingly frozen atmosphere was shattered and the crowd finally woke from their stupors, expressions of absurdity on their faces.

All was in an uproar.

Chen Changsheng's proposal was simply far too absurd!

This matter involved the throne of the Great Zhou, the future of the Human race, the contents of the history books, and the fates of millions.

And he wanted to fight with his master to make this decision?

Back in Luoyang, Zhou Dufu's fight with the Demon Lord truly did change the course of history, but that had been a battle with an outsider. If all disputes in the world could be resolved so simply, why did so many descendants of the Imperial clan have to die within the Hundred Herb Garden, and why did the Orthodox Academy have to become a desolate tomb twenty-some years ago?

"This is impossible."

Wang Zhice looked at Chen Changsheng and declared. There was no derision in his voice. On the contrary, it seemed somewhat soothing.

Chen Changsheng earnestly replied, "Since we place the importance of all living beings above all, and don't want too many people to die so as to avoid weakening humanity's strength, but none of us want to yield, we should just decide victory and defeat with a fight. In the end, whether he dies or I die, everyone else will live. Isn't this the best method?"

The crowd gradually settled down as they digested his words.

The crowd turned toward the south, toward the gradually settling plume of dust and the other, slowly approaching, plume of dust. They sensed the killing intent resting within that plume of dust.

The absurdity they had felt from hearing Chen Changsheng's proposal had been greatly diluted. Although still absurd, it now seemed reasonable.

Critically, Chen Changsheng was right. Whether he died or Shang Xingzhou died, what did it have to do with them?

They would remain alive and the capital would be fine. Was there anything more important?

Wang Zhice's gaze deepened as he said, "The grand events of the world are no game, and certainly not some child's quarrel."

To use a fight to decide the future of the Human race was an absurd action, no matter how one looked at it.

Chen Changsheng looked at Wang Zhice and argued, "I've read many books since I was a child. These books contained many schemes and plots, but if one examined them more deeply or simply, what difference is there between those schemes and the children of Xining Village quarreling with each other? It's just whether they're fighting over sugared fruits, fish, the world, or the amount of space one takes up on the history books."

Wang Zhice was quiet for a very long time.

Before Chen Changsheng and Gou Hanshi, he had been the first

genius to become well-versed in the Daoist Canon.

The number of books he had read was in no way inferior to Chen Changsheng's, but it was only today that he began to consider the contents of these books from a different angle.

Ruling a great country was like cooking a delicate fish. He had always believed that this phrase meant that one had to be cautious, but according to Chen Changsheng's way of thinking, it could mean that one didn't need to care at all.

Warlords contending for hegemony were just children fighting. Before engaging in a massacre within the courts of kings, one had to bear in mind that even killing a fish would spill blood.

Wang Zhice said, "I admit that your view might be reasonable. However, your master will not agree."

While Chen Changsheng and Wang Zhice were speaking, Shang Xingzhou had remained silent.

He stood within the South Stream Temple sword array. He had no intention of breaking out of the array, only quietly looked into the distance, occupied with his own thoughts.

Chen Changsheng knew that Wang Zhice had spoken rightly.

He knew more than anyone else what Shang Xingzhou was thinking.

Shang Xingzhou was the world's most cautious and most foresighted person.

He would only embark on an action once a plan was made. Without absolute grasp over the situation, he would not strike, and even when he struck, he would not leave any trace behind.

So even when the ministers within the Lingyan Pavilion had died at his hand, only a few people in the world knew of Daoist Ji's existence.

So even when several years had passed after the bloody incident

of the Orthodox Academy, not even the Tianhai Divine Empress had been able to find him.

A person like Shang Xingzhou would never bet all his chips on one fight.

Even if this fight seemed like a guaranteed victory for him.

Because what he wanted was to pull off a feat for the ages, and also because fights always had aspects that could not be controlled.

How could Chen Changsheng convince him?

"When I saw Daoist Wu walk out of the stone wall, I knew how I should proceed with this matter."

After saying this, Chen Changsheng glanced at Xu Yourong.

It was also at that moment that he knew that Wang Zhice would appear and that she would lose to his master.

He looked to Wang Zhice and continued, "And then, I suddenly thought of a method."

These words caused countless people to look at him.

Shang Xingzhou also turned to look at him as if wanting to know just what sort of idea had gotten into his head.

"I knew that it would be very difficult for me to convince Master to agree to my proposal."

Chen Changsheng said to Wang Zhice, "But you can do it."

Shang Xingzhou had invited Wang Zhice to the capital to have him persuade Xu Yourong to renounce her insane and destructive plan.

Chen Changsheng had done nothing because he was waiting for Wang Zhice to appear.

He was hoping that Wang Zhice could persuade Shang Xingzhou to agree to his proposal.

Yes, probably only Wang Zhice could convince Shang Xingzhou.

"Besides, since we're going to fight, we need a judge."

Chen Changsheng added, "In the entire continent, only Sir is qualified to be this judge, because Sir has a sufficiently high prestige that everyone will believe in Sir's impartiality."

After a pause, Wang Zhice said, "So you really were waiting for me to appear."

The crowd finally understood what Chen Changsheng was saying and understood his arrangements.

Xu Yourong had entered the palace late in the night while Prince Chen Liu had traveled overnight to Luoyang. While the entire capital was fraught with tension, he had chosen to quietly contemplate the sword in his stone room within the Li Palace.

Why? Because he needed to prepare for this fight, because he was waiting for Shang Xingzhou to invite Wang Zhice.

He had always been waiting for Wang Zhice to appear.

He had been waiting for Wang Zhice here.

But how could he be so sure that Wang Zhice would help him?

Because of Wang Zhice's prestige and impartiality?

Wang Zhice looked at Chen Changsheng and said, "I do not have a good relationship with your master."

His expression greatly cooled.

Chen Changsheng said, "I know, but since Sir has come, that means that the relationship is not so bad as I originally imagined."

The vast majority of the meritorious ministers and generals in the Lingyan Pavilion had died at Shang Xingzhou's hands.

Shang Xingzhou was Emperor Taizong's most inconspicuous and most terrifying knife.

Wang Zhice had a poor relationship with Emperor Taizong, and he also had a portrait in the Lingyan Pavilion.

Logically speaking, he should have loathed Shang Xingzhou.

Chen Changsheng had once believed this to be the case.

But when he discovered that Wang Zhice would accept Shang Xingzhou's request to come to the capital, he began to re-examine the relationship between the two.

He thought about how Wang Zhice had suddenly appeared back when he was being pursued by the Demon Lord in Mount Han.

This assured him that his master and Wang Zhice had always had the means to communicate with each other.

Wang Zhice replied, "You're wrong. My coming to the capital has nothing to do with your master."

They had returned to his words from the beginning...

'All living beings of the world'.

Chen Changsheng was a little surprised, but he was not disappointed.

Because persuasion was really just choosing a side.

As long as Wang Zhice was willing to stand on his side, Shang Xingzhou had to agree to his proposal.

Or else Shang Xingzhou would pay an even greater price, a price that no intelligent person would be willing to pay.

The problem was, even if Wang Zhice was moved by his words to not support Shang Xingzhou, why would he support Chen Changsheng?

Because of all living beings of the world?

This was truly a forceful reason, but Chen Changsheng did not want to use this phrase.

This phrase had appeared too many times today, and it made him rather uncomfortable.

He sincerely said to Wang Zhice, "Because... Daoist Wu will die."

Chapter 1097 – A Koi of the Yellow River Quietly Sinking Down in the Dark Night

Snow lightly drifted in the biting winds.

Daoist Wu sat on the cold ground, his legs splayed out in front of him. His face burned with resentment and his body was covered in blood as he issued curse after curse at the sky.

But he did not dare to move, not even lower his head, because the coldness at his neck was growing increasingly vivid.

It wasn't because of the snowflakes landing on his collar.

It was because An Hua was standing behind him, her eyes fixed on his neck, her hands tightly gripping a sharp dagger.

.....

.....

Wang Zhice stared into Chen Changsheng's eyes, his brows slightly rising and his gaze turning incomparably sharp.

When he saw Chen Changsheng appear in the Mausoleum of Books, he knew that Daoist Wu had failed.

But he did not care, as he believed that with Daoist Wu's age and reputation, the Li Palace might imprison him, but they would not humiliate him.

He had never imagined that Chen Changsheng would use Daoist Wu's life to threaten him.

One could imagine from this that Daoist Wu was in a disastrous situation at the moment.

Wang Zhice was rather unfamiliar with this sensation.

It had been many years since anyone dared to plot against him.

Whether they were out of good intentions or bad intentions.

Even when Shang Xingzhou was traveling in and out of the estates belonging to the ministers of the Lingyan Pavilion, he had never harbored any intentions against Wang Zhice.

Otherwise, history would have taken on a completely different form.

And no one had ever threatened him.

He silently stared at Chen Changsheng.

He was the most famous scholar in the last one thousand years, but he was certainly not a scholar who didn't have the strength to truss a chicken, and he was certainly not frail.

He had once led the united armies of the Human and Demi-human races from Tianliang County to Xuelao City, leaving a trail of blood and corpses behind him.

In terms of killing people, not even the number of people killed by everyone else present in the Mausoleum of Books could match up to the number of people he had killed.

His eyes seemed like an abyss, but they also seemed to burn with a fierce flame.

But Chen Changsheng was fearless, calmly matching his gaze with no intention of taking back his words.

A light flap stirred the snow.

Xu Yourong's right hand lightly fell on the hilt of the temple sword while her wings of pure white began to slowly beat.

Gou Hanshi, his martial brothers, and the three elders of Mount Li's Sword Hall wordlessly unsheathed their swords, ready to charge forward.

Wang Po's left hand was no longer wrapped around his blade. It was gripping the sheath, prepared at any moment to remove the blade.

If that metal blade that had once severed the Luo River were

unsheathed once more, would the river around the Mausoleum of Books be able to continue flowing?

The elders of Gentle Stream Monastery, the Blazing Sun Sect, and the other southern sects struggled for a while before deciding to raise their weapons.

The expressions of the people allied to the Imperial Court darkened.

Was this what it meant to prepare to charge together without a single word?

But the one standing across from them was Wang Zhice!

But this was the path of Wang Po's blade.

The path of Mount Li's sword.

And it was the path of Chen Changsheng's cultivation.

Straight.

If Wang Zhice did not agree to Chen Changsheng's proposal, Daoist Wu would die.

It was just that simple, just that uncompromising.

Several of the Chen princes subconsciously looked at the Prince of Xiang.

As the strongest member of the Imperial clan, his stance was extremely important, sufficient to alter the course of the Imperial court and the army.

Prince Chen Liu had already fallen into the hands of the Li Palace.

If the two sides really did break into hostilities, would Prince Chen Liu be able to survive?

But what they saw was that the Prince of Xiang had closed his eyes again.

Was this because what the eyes did not see was clean, or was it

because he was thinking about what he would choose if the life of his son were threatened?

.....

.....

"Several hundred years later, when you turn to look back at the past and realize that today, you began to transform into the person that you most loathed..."

Wang Zhice's eyes regained their composure as he said to Chen Changsheng, "You might feel an unimaginable remorse."

Chen Changsheng thought of his conversations with Tang Thirty-Six.

Those conversations had taken place on the great banyan tree, by the lake, and on the shore of the Wenshui.

The light of the setting sun had been sliced into countless golden leaves, providing such wealth that it almost made one tired of it.

A fat koi that had eaten too much was slowly sinking into the mud at the bottom.

"I will not become someone like you."

He declared to Wang Zhice.

Wang Zhice asked, "Why?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "Because I do not want to become someone like you."

'I won't because I won't.' There was no logical connection here, so there was naturally no reasoning.

Wang Zhice shook his head. "This is not a reasonable explanation."

Chen Changsheng returned, "When have any of you ever spoken reason with me?"

.....

.....

The grass by the lake was somewhat yellowed, no green blades having sprouted. The bits of paper falling onto it were blown here and there by the wind.

The teachers and students had left in such a rush that it was somewhat hard to not leave a mess.

The Orthodox Academy now was just as cold and deserted as the Li Palace.

It seemed to have returned to the graveyard it had been for twenty-some years.

It was extremely appropriate for the coming battle.

No matter which of them died, they probably wouldn't mind being buried here.

Both teacher and student had been the principal here, and were certain to leave an imperishable mark on the history of the Orthodox Academy.

Tang Thirty-Six stood by the lake, thinking these empty thoughts.

It was early spring, so the lake should have thawed, but the sudden drop in temperature today had caused a thin layer of ice to form on the surface.

The fish had sunk into the very bottom of the lake. Although mud and filth were everywhere, it was at least warmer.

Su Moyu had confirmed that all the teachers and students had left, and walked to the lake shore.

He worriedly asked, "You're sure that he can succeed?"

"I don't know."

Tang Thirty-Six looked at the lake and said, "But I'm sure that he's not happy."

.....

.....

Wang Zhice said no more.

Because he found it impossible to reply to Chen Changsheng's question.

Then one could also understand why he could not outspoke Chen Changsheng.

He was well-versed in the Daoist Canon and had an extremely deep well of experience to draw from. His intelligence was without par and he was exceedingly eloquent, yet there were several times today where he had found himself unable to reply to Chen Changsheng.

Because Chen Changsheng was not debating, was not speaking reason with him.

He had spoken nothing but the truth.

'With the truth in hand, reason is on my side.'

If one used Tang Thirty-Six's words, he was a person who lived very purely.

Xu Yourong's words were simpler, more accurate.

Chen Changsheng was a true person.

This was why she loved him.

When Wang Zhice fell silent, she raised her right hand.

The sword Qis receded, their awe-inspiring intents returning to the forest.

The South Stream Temple sword array was dispelled.

Shang Xingzhou appeared before the people.

Before Chen Changsheng's eyes.

Chapter 1098 – You Don't Want to Try?

"Master, when you had me go to the Lingyan Pavilion to read Lord Wang's notebook, you said that the secret to defying the heavens and changing fate could be found inside, but I didn't see it."

Chen Changsheng's words to Shang Xingzhou caused the mood in the Mausoleum of Books to become rather strange.

This was a secret known to very few people.

Even after this master and disciple began to fall out, this secret had still not managed to get out.

These words should have been said three years ago, but Chen Changsheng felt that since all the time in Xining Village's old temple, including all those conversations, had all been part of a plan, what meaning would there be in anguished questions about the past? Moreover, he had obtained an extremely important Heavenly Tome Monolith from the Lingyan Pavilion and seen many secrets within Wang Zhice's notebook, allowing him to comprehend many things, greatly assisting him in his cultivation, and providing many warnings on how to live his life. This was already enough.

He added, "The only thing I saw in that notebook was the phrase 'eating people'."

Reminiscence appeared on Wang Zhice's face, somewhat emotional, or even sorrowful.

The experiences he had written down in that notebook were the most authentic historical accounts of the founding era of the Great Zhou Dynasty.

The most authentic history was often also the darkest.

The seemingly calm sounds of reading from that humble alley had concealed countless screams from the flower barges on the Luo

River.

The seemingly monotonous life in the court had concealed countless gleaming blades and shadowy swords.

Wang Zhice had not mentioned the coup of the Hundred Herb Garden, but a few words here and there exposed the cruelty of that night.

The so-called golden age could only follow one person's desires in the end. The steps leading to the highest point were strewn with corpses drenched in blood. The several hundred years that followed were full of conflicts of father against son, brother against brother, husband against wife, lord against subject. So... master against disciple naturally wasn't anything absurd.

Chen Changsheng paused for a while, then said, "I just could never understand why you never personally acted."

Three years ago, on that snowy night in the Orthodox Academy, he and Shang Xingzhou had discussed this question.

At the time, he had provided an answer. He was mentioning it again only because he wanted to vent his feelings.

Shang Xingzhou's Dao and heart could be described as perfect. The only weakness was Chen Changsheng.

Because with anything he did, even slaughtering everyone in the capital, he could still convince himself that there was a reason for such action.

But with regards to Chen Changsheng, he found it impossible to convince himself.

The more he tried, the more unpleasant he found Chen Changsheng.

It had started from Xining Village, started from the old temple, started from many years ago.

As time passed, this emotion weighed heavier and heavier on his

heart, and he found the him that did not like Chen Changsheng more and more unpleasant.

He did not want to see Chen Changsheng.

At the very end, he had even wished that Chen Changsheng had never appeared in this world.

He did not want to act personally because this would only make his Dao heart even harder to pacify.

He hoped that Chen Changsheng could die at someone else's hand.

Three years ago, in the Orthodox Academy, he had said that as long as Chen Changsheng did not return to the capital, he would not move against him.

But later on, he found it impossible to resist the temptation.

And so Zhou Tong had died, Chusu had failed, and that Mu of the Great Western Continent was killed.

Chen Changsheng did not die in the snowy mountains, and encountered that perilous situation on Holy Maiden Peak.

"We cultivate the heart. Of the myriad things in the world, only the heart cannot fool itself."

Chen Changsheng asked in confusion, "If I died at another person's hand, could you really convince yourself that it had nothing to do with you?"

Shang Xingzhou looked at him, saying nothing.

Chen Changsheng finished, "Please personally act. In the final moment, perhaps you might be able to clearly see your own heart. Does Master truly not want to try?"

.....

.....

I want to try.

In that storm in Xunyang City, when facing Zhu Luo, Wang Po had uttered these words. In White Emperor City, when facing an unbeatable opponent, Xuanyuan Po had also said these words. Xu Yourong had also said them, as had Chen Changsheng.

Compared to Shang Xingzhou, they were still very young. They had enough time to try, a margin to commit error. Perhaps it was for this reason that when they reached a point where they had to choose, they would exhibit more bravery and straightforwardness.

Then, you don't want to try?

Shang Xingzhou calmly stared at Chen Changsheng.

Chen Changsheng's and Xu Yourong's performance today truly had been remarkable, earning his admiration. And there was also that child in the Imperial Palace. His silence today had truly been splendid beyond compare.

But these juniors had still underestimated that dense volcanic power hidden beneath his patience and silence.

Even if Wang Zhice had been persuaded to remain uninvolved, he was still confident that he could seize control of the capital.

There was no reason for him to accept Chen Changsheng's proposal, but then he heard that question.

This was a drop of dew hanging from a branch drooping over a stone wall: beautiful, pure, touching.

It made him think back to many, many years ago, when he was still just a young Daoist boy.

In Luoyang's Monastery of Eternal Spring were two Daoist boys called Yin and Shang.

At that time, they had not yet parted to separately seek the Dao at the Heavenly Dao Academy and the Orthodox Academy.

Their master was naturally no ordinary individual, but he had still silently died.

It had truly been a chaotic era back then. Luoyang was besieged for a very long time, with demons all over the mountains and plains outside the city, and the entire world smelled of rotting fish.

When they left Luoyang, they were accompanied by a youth with the surname of Tang.

In that journey, they saw many miserable sights, deeply affecting each of them in different ways.

Finally, at a certain place, he had stopped and said to those mountains awash in twilight, "I still want to try."

He changed his name and placed himself under Emperor Taizong's service, getting to know many extraordinary individuals.

Those people were front and center in the action, but he continued to stand in dark corners, silent and inconspicuous.

He remained as such no matter how glorious the others were.

The demons had still not been exterminated, meaning that he could not relax for a single moment.

In the end, he got used to this life, even liked this sort of life.

An emperor needed a person like this to help him from the shadows in order to become emperor.

Other than a scant few people, no one knew that he was Shang Xingzhou, a legitimate successor to the Orthodoxy. They only knew him as the doctor, Daoist Ji.

When he overturned the Tianhai Divine Empress's rule, he decided to put Zhou Tong in a high position without regard to the undercurrents of society. This had not just been because of his promise. He simply did not think there was anything wrong with what Zhou Tong did. It had been what he was doing for the last few centuries.

It was just that he would occasionally feel a tinge of regret.

Gone was his youth.

Shang Xingzhou looked at Chen Changsheng, looked at those calm and persistent eyes, at his clear and vivid features, and he thought to himself, exactly this sort of youth.

Several hundred years had passed. Luoyang was no longer besieged and no more were those dismal scenes in which human ate human. No matter how today ended, whether or not the human world fell into civil war, the Human race would no longer need to worry about returning to that horrifying era. People would no longer have to live such bitter lives.

Didn't that mean that he also did not need to live such a bitter life?

That starting from now, he could live more for himself, a little more wantonly?

As he quietly stared at Chen Changsheng, he suddenly said, "Fine. Let us try and see if we can end this story."

When Emperor Xian's illness worsened and Tianhai refused to return the throne, he began to write this story.

This story had opened with that existence on that continent covered in white sand, on the other side of the sea of stars, helping him pluck a fruit.

So this story naturally had to end with the death of this fruit.

Chapter 1099 – Before the Fight

The Orthodox Academy was extremely cold and cheerless, so quiet and still that it seemed like a tomb.

All the teachers, students, and workers had already left. Even Su Moyu and Tang Thirty-Six were now walking out of the academy gate.

Su Moyu turned and looked at the ivy-covered academy walls. He anxiously asked, "Just how is he prepared to fight?"

Tang Thirty-Six's gaze fell deep within the Orthodox Academy, but he said nothing.

This was the question that everyone wanted to know the answer to.

In front of the Divine Path of the Mausoleum of Books...

Countless gazes descended upon Chen Changsheng.

In a series of soft footsteps, Xu Yourong walked up to Chen Changsheng.

She did not stand farther ahead of him, nor did she deliberately stand behind him.

She stood shoulder to shoulder with him.

No one was astonished or stunned at this sight. On the contrary, they seemed much more relieved.

From the moment Chen Changsheng proposed that he and Shang Xingzhou fight, many people had expected to see this sight.

In terms of seniority and strength, Chen Changsheng was far inferior to Shang Xingzhou. It was completely unreasonable for them to engage in a straightforward fight.

This sort of awkward fairness was actually true fairness. Not even his enemies would reject this proposal.

For him to join together with Xu Yourong was only right and proper.

All the continent knew that their harmony of swords possessed unimaginable might that could even break through the limit of the Divine Domain.

But even so, no one was optimistic on their chances of defeating Shang Xingzhou.

Their swords combined had once succeeded in forcing Wuqiong Bi to retreat at Holy Maiden Peak, and had shaken that Angel of Sacred Light from the other continent in White Emperor City.

But their opponent today was Shang Xingzhou, who was unquestionably the strongest of the current age.

Shang Xingzhou's cultivation level was far above Wuqiong Bi's, and he had even torn off the wings of that Angel of Sacred Light.

Even if it was as Xu Yourong had calculated and Shang Xingzhou really was hiding his injuries, he still held an absolute advantage over Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong.

But now, Chen Changsheng said something extremely surprising.

"This is a matter between master and disciple. I hope that we alone can resolve it."

He looked at Xu Yourong, but his words were also for Wang Po, the Mount Li Sword Sect, and the experts of the Orthodoxy.

These words sent the crowd into a buzz as they wondered, how will he fight?

Xu Yourong was very surprised and looked at him in confusion, appearing at a loss.

Shang Xingzhou, on the contrary, quickly understood his intentions and indifferently said, "Fine."

Wang Zhice had also guessed at what Chen Changsheng had arranged. Arching his brows, he said, "I have no objection."

At this moment, the latest news came from the capital: the Orthodox Academy had been emptied.

This news made the crowd believe that they had understood.

The Orthodox Academy truly was the ideal place for today's fight.

But the crowd almost immediately realized that they still did not know how Chen Changsheng was prepared to fight.

.....

.....

Before going to the Orthodox Academy, Shang Xingzhou went to the Imperial Palace.

The two places were nearby. The only thing between them was a rather old and mottled wall.

The abnormal weather was still dispersing. A little snow was still falling from the sky.

Shang Xingzhou stood in the plaza, quietly gazing at that grandiose and magnificent hall.

The snow drifted onto his hair and clothes. But it did not melt. It stuck to him, seeming to take on a sort of unreal existence.

Ten-some eunuchs and maids kneeled in the corridor or by the stone steps outside the side door. Their heads were lowered and they did not dare to speak, their bodies trembling in fear.

The emperor was in this hall.

Shang Xingzhou quietly looked at the hall for a long time, but he ultimately chose to leave without entering the hall.

No one knew whether his expression had changed at this moment.

After hearing Eunuch Lin's whispered report, Yuren slightly increased the grip of the fingers that he used to hold his book, his knuckles whitening.

While Shang Xingzhou had been standing outside the hall, he had been reading.

He had been very focused, so his head had been very low.

No one knew if he had been able to understand the contents of the book.

And no one could see if his expression had changed.

The array guarding this hall had been deactivated some time ago. Chilly wind blew in from the seams in the window, ruffling the pages of his book.

The Imperial Palace was extremely still and quiet, just like that lonely mountain in the clouds while it was still unawakened.

After some time, the sounds of water splashing could be heard in the hall.

Immediately after, Eunuch Lin spoke in a voice trembling from heartache.

"Your Majesty, use a hot towel to warm your eyes."

.....

.....

The area outside the Orthodox Academy was packed with people. Such a scene had taken place many times before.

After the Ivy Festival, all the idlers of the capital had besieged the Orthodox Academy.

Daoist Siyuan and Linghai Zhiwang used the All-School Martial Exhibition to send an unending stream of experts to challenge the Orthodox Academy.

After the coup of the Mausoleum of Books, the Orthodox Academy was surrounded by the cavalry of the Imperial Court for three days.

But today was different from those other times, because it was

extremely quiet outside the Orthodox Academy.

Let alone cursing and arguing, not even the sound of chatting could be heard today.

The entire capital was similarly quiet.

From the nobles to the cultivators to the ordinary citizens, everyone's attention was on the coming fight between master and disciple.

This fight had not yet begun, but it had already been recorded in the annals of history.

One could even say that this was the most important fight since Zhou Dufu's battle with the Demon Lord.

The Grand Examination which would so often attract the attention of the entire continent had long since been forgotten.

The examinees and priests from the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education were still in the Green Leaf World. It was impossible to say if they had noticed anything strange.

The potted Green Leaf had been placed in a room within a restaurant outside the Orthodox Academy.

Tang Thirty-Six did not even glance at it.

He was standing outside the restaurant.

All the streets around the Imperial Palace had already been placed under heavy guard.

Many people were in Hundred Flowers Lane.

He saw Wang Po, the Prince of Xiang, the Prince of Zhongshan, and even the Old Lady of the Mutuo clan, who had at some point reinserted herself into the crowd. He saw Linghai Zhiwang, who had just hurried back from the Heavenly Dao Academy, and he saw Daoist Siyuan rushing over from the Road of Peace. But he did not see Xu Yourong.

.....

.....

Xu Yourong had gone to the Orange Garden.

The Prince of Louyang paced back and forth across the room, his face pale as he muttered, "What do I do, what do I do..."

Mo Yu was also very worried, her husband's appearance putting her in a foul mood. She asked, "Just what is he thinking?"

Xu Yourong softly said, "I don't know."

Mo Yu angrily said, "Then you should go over there and watch! What do you mean by coming here!"

Xu Yourong looked at her and said, "I came to remind you that based on my agreement with His Majesty, you should be doing some things."

Mo Yu slightly frowned and asked, "Even if you know that there's an extremely high chance that he'll lose?"

Xu Yourong calmly answered, "If he loses, then we will strike directly."

Mo Yu froze as she realized, you truly are the Empress's only rightful successor.

.....

.....

The house was no home to spring, summer, or autumn.

The temperature in the room was the harsh cold of midwinter.

Chen Changsheng sat by the window, his eyes closed.

A bamboo dragonfly had been placed on the table, as had the Divine Staff.

The little Black Dragon stood behind him, shrouding him in her dragon breath.

No frost formed on the floorboards, because all the chill was accurately falling on Chen Changsheng's body.

Low temperatures could repair the finest of wounds, ensure the toughness of one's body, and pacify one's sea of consciousness.

In the Li Palace's stone chamber, he had calmed his mind and comprehended the sword for many days. He had already made a great many preparations.

But he knew that no preparations could be enough to defeat someone like his master.

After some time, he opened his eyes, took up the Divine Staff, and walked out of his room and to a room on the first floor.

He put away the Divine Robe and exchanged it for that thin attire in the wardrobe.

The room was Zhexiu's, and the set of clothes was also Zhexiu's.

The front lapel of these clothes was very short, and the sleeves were even shorter. It was extremely suitable for fighting, and even more suitable for putting everything on the line.

This done, he walked out of the house.

Shang Xingzhou was already standing by the lake.

Wang Zhice was nearby.

Chen Changsheng threw an object at him.

Wang Zhice stretched out a hand and caught it. Glancing at it, he sighed.

As expected, it was that black stone.

Chapter 1100 – The Location of the Fight Is Suddenly Changed!

Wang Zhice became somewhat emotional as he gazed at the black stone in his hand.

This black stone had originally been his.

After the Grand Examination, Chen Changsheng had taken this stone out from the stone wall in the Lingyan Pavilion.

At the time, Wang Zhice had been acting on a whim, but also out of an evil interest, a silent jeer at Emperor Taizong.

He had not expected that after so many years, someone still knew of this secret, and that someone would get this black stone.

What happened after that was starlight bathing the capital for the night and the sudden rise in Chen Changsheng's reputation.

Many people said that Chen Changsheng was a lot like him, whether it was in terms of talent, temperament, or encounters.

Chen Changsheng had found the objects he had hidden in the Lingyan Pavilion, so from a certain perspective, he really was his successor.

Perhaps it was for these reasons that Wang Zhice had always rather admired Chen Changsheng.

As a result, he had appeared at Mount Han and saved Chen Changsheng's life from the Demon Lord.

Today, he had come to the capital to persuade Xu Yourong also out of the compassion he felt for Chen Changsheng.

When he snatched the black stone that Chen Changsheng had thrown over, he realized that all his efforts had been unnecessary.

Chen Changsheng had made preparations long ago, preparations to fight with his teacher.

He had chosen the ideal battleground.

It was precisely the place the black stone led to.

.....

.....

While Wang Zhice was looking at the black stone, the little Black Dragon was looking at him with eyes brimming with resentment.

One could only imagine how deep was the loathing that had been built up over several hundred years of imprisonment.

When she saw Chen Changsheng throw the black stone to Wang Zhice, she became very angry and let out a resentful snort.

Wang Zhice ignored her. He said to Shang Xingzhou and Chen Changsheng, "Both of you take care of yourselves."

Shang Xingzhou said nothing, his expression indifferent.

Chen Changsheng calmly bowed and then nodded at the Black Dragon in greeting.

In a gust of wind and dance of snowflakes, the little Black Dragon left the Orthodox Academy.

Shang Xingzhou turned to Chen Changsheng.

Waves began to stir despite the lack of wind, causing the thin layer of ice on the lake to crack and release a cold fog.

The lake began to rise and fall, at first a gentle complaint, and then a furious roar. The waves crashed against the shore, flinging up countless pieces of snow.

The spray from the waves, countless pearls of water, looked just like a torrential rain.

Chen Changsheng turned to Shang Xingzhou.

The eyes of master and disciple met.

There was a dull boom.

The dancing snowflakes, the cold fog, and the lake water falling in a torrential rain all went up in smoke.

Innumerable wisps of smoke flowed all across the lake, reflecting the sunlight and producing all sorts of gorgeous illusions. Even a rainbow could be glimpsed within.

When the mist and smoke settled, Chen Changsheng and Shang Xingzhou had already vanished.

Wang Zhice walked underneath the great banyan tree and silently gazed at the distant other end of the rainbow.

The Orthodox Academy truly was the ideal place for this master and disciple to fight.

But the fight had begun in the Garden of Zhou.

.....

.....

The Garden of Zhou was a miniature world, possessing extremely special laws.

The upper limit of the cultivation level that the Garden of Zhou could hold was based on the cultivation level of the Garden of Zhou's master.

In Zhou Dufu's age, his cultivation level was supreme, and so the cultivation level that the Garden of Zhou could contain could be regarded as without an upper limit.

Whether it was the previous Demon Lord, that mighty Black Frost Dragon, that dazzling youth whose talent rarely appeared even once a generation, Chen Xuanba, or any other of those exceptional experts that followed, they could all enter the Garden of Zhou, and they could even use their maximum strength. From a certain perspective, this implied, or proved in advance, that the strength of these experts could not possibly exceed Zhou Dufu's. At most, they could draw equal to him.

After Zhou Dufu died, the Garden of Zhou lost its master, so the rules changed on their own to allow only cultivators of the Ethereal Opening Realm to enter, with any that exceeded it triggering the seals. This would lead the laws to kill the perpetrator, or backlash and trigger the collapse of the Garden of Zhou.

Now that the Garden of Zhou was in Chen Changsheng's hands, it had restored its upper bound to the peak of Star Condensation.

In the last few years, when he was facing the Demon Lord in Mount Han or in the snowy mountains, or when he was facing any other Divine Domain expert, Chen Changsheng had never attempted to use the Garden of Zhou to hold his opponent. Other than the fact that he was worried that these Divine Domain experts might have a grasp over the laws of space, he was even more worried that the Garden of Zhou might collapse...

Precisely as it almost did when the Golden-winged Great Peng and the dragon of ten thousand swords clashed.

Today's circumstances were completely different.

This was an arranged fight.

By agreeing to enter the Garden of Zhou, Shang Xingzhou had agreed to the conditions.

He would suppress his cultivation level to below the Divine Domain.

In this way, he would not suffer an attack from the laws of the Garden of Zhou, and the Garden of Zhou would not risk the danger of collapsing.

More importantly, master and disciple would be put on the same level.

The two sides were competing in terms of Dao, battle prowess, and intelligence.

This was a fair battle.

.....

.....

The first to notice the warping of space within the Orthodox Academy were Wang Po and the Prince of Xiang.

After them were the three elders of Mount Li's Sword Hall who had once guarded that rainbow.

More and more people began to realize that something had happened in the Orthodox Academy.

The silence brought on by shock and surprise did not last too long. At last, the stillness in Hundred Flowers Lane was broken.

The Prince of Zhongshan coldly laughed while several Divine Generals revealed expressions of scorn.

The sound of a cup shattering came from a tea house. It sounded like it had been broken out of anger.

That Chen Changsheng was the master of the Garden of Zhou had ceased to be a secret a long time ago.

Logically speaking, he could use the laws of the Garden of Zhou in his battle, giving him a massive advantage.

But still no one would believe that he could defeat Shang Xingzhou.

An entire cultivation realm lay between them.

Even if Shang Xingzhou suppressed his cultivation to below the Divine Domain...

This gap still remained.

To exist was to exist, and it would not just vanish for any random reason.

Whether in experience, intelligence, insight, or any other domain, Shang Xingzhou far surpassed Chen Changsheng.

How could a person who had once walked across a vast ocean not be able to stride over a small stream?

Would someone who had climbed the highest mountain forget how to walk upon returning to the ground?

It was just like the little Black Dragon. Although she had not yet matured and formally entered the Divine Domain, several of her attributes were innately Divine, so she could be considered invincible beneath the Divine Domain.

A Shang Xingzhou who had voluntarily suppressed his cultivation to below the Divine Domain was a similar existence, perhaps even more frightening.

How could Chen Changsheng defeat him? More importantly, even if Chen Changsheng had hidden some mystical strategies within the Garden of Zhou, if he really did reach a critical juncture, Shang Xingzhou was completely capable of forcing his way out of the Garden of Zhou. When that time came, what could Chen Changsheng do?

.....

.....

The questions occupying the minds of the crowd had naturally been thoroughly pondered by the participants, Chen Changsheng and Shang Xingzhou.

At this moment, they were standing in front of Sunset Valley.

The distant red sun was slowly walking along the perimeter of the grassy plains, painting the cliffs red.

Many extraordinary characters had come to this place.

Zhou Dufu, Chen Xuanba, the owner of the Mountain Sea Sword, and many others.

Many miracles had taken place here.

One was when Xu Yourong was about to die, and her Phoenix

soul had awakened once more.

"You want to create a miracle, but this place proved long ago that there are no miracles."

Shang Xingzhou continued, "Xi Ke lost, the grandmaster of Mount Li lost, and Chen Xuanba also lost. Zhou Dufu was always the winner."

If one claimed that there really was such a thing as fate, then the annotation of 'fate' would be that the strong would always be strong. In the face of true strength, hot blood, desire, dreams, ideals, persistence, courage, sacrifice, and all those other fine-sounding words were utterly meaningless.

Chen Changsheng said, "Master, you said that I couldn't live past the age of twenty, but I did it."

Shang Xingzhou said, "But that also depended on her strength."

"But that is not fate. At least, it is not the fate you arranged for me."

Chen Changsheng gazed down at the plains below Shang Xingzhou, at the water grass that flourished after three years, at the monsters roaming in and out of the grass. He was quiet for a while, then he turned back to Shang Xingzhou and said, "I declare this a miracle."

Shang Xingzhou calmly looked at him and asked, "Is that so?"

With a flutter of his sleeve, he raised his left hand.

Five steady and slender fingers pointed at Chen Changsheng.

A cool breeze rustled the old trees of Sunset Valley.

It was a beautiful sight, but Chen Changsheng felt an incredible danger.

His hand immediately went for his hilt.

He was prepared to take out the Stainless Sword and hold it in

front of his chest, using the Stupid Sword that he had not used in so long.

He was wearing Zhexiu's clothes, so his sleeves were very short.

His shoulders had been relaxed this entire time.

In the entire continent, no one other than Liu Qing was faster than him at striking with the sword.

If even this was still not enough, he had even faster swords.

Just a thought would cause the several thousand swords in his sheath to pour out and form a sea of swords.

Let alone Shang Xingzhou suppressed to below the Divine Domain, even Shang Xingzhou at his normal level of strength could not instantly break the South Stream Temple sword array.

As long as he was given a few moments, he could find an opportunity.

And yet...

His hand could not fall upon his hilt.

Several thousand swords failed to soar through the air and form the South Stream Temple sword array.

Because his sword had vanished.

Both the Stainless Sword and its sheath were no longer there.

The cool breeze running through Sunset Valley ruffled his empty belt.

In the next moment...

A sword appeared in Shang Xingzhou's hand.

His fingers were slender and steady, acting like this sword had always been his.

"Everything of yours belongs to me, including this sword and sheath."

Shang Xingzhou calmly asked, "How could you possibly defeat me?"

The gentle breeze lingered, carrying a bone-chilling cold.

Clouds emerged from beneath Shang Xingzhou's feet.

Shang Xingzhou floated up to Chen Changsheng, his right hand descending.

His palm seemed ordinary and unremarkable, but it seemed in accord with the laws of the world, seemingly unavoidable.

Chen Changsheng could not avoid it.

Shang Xingzhou's palm landed against his stomach.

There was a light clap.

Chen Changsheng was jolted off the cliff.

An arc was drawn in the sky outside Sunset Valley.

It was like a falling leaf or a stone was silently dropping toward the plains several li away.

Table of Contents

[Way of Choices](#)

[Synopsis](#)

[Copyright](#)

[Chapter 1001 – Even if You Hear the Real Story, What Can You Do?](#)

[Chapter 1002 – Go Die, Just Like You Lived](#)

[Chapter 1003 – Exist or Perish, the Bottom of the Well or Its Mouth?](#)

[Chapter 1004 – Using an Array to Break an Array](#)

[Chapter 1005 – The Darkness in Front of the Imperial City Is Torn Open](#)

[Chapter 1006 – The Small White Flower Falling in the Hair, a Murderous Aura Gradually Spreading](#)

[Chapter 1007 – Straight, Difficult](#)

[Chapter 1008 – A Conversation with the World, a Negotiation with Oneself](#)

[Chapter 1009 – A Thousand Years Later](#)

[Chapter 1010 – I Just Don't Want to Make That Judgment](#)

[Chapter 1011 – The Courtyard Surrounded in the Snow](#)

[Chapter 1012 – The Orthodoxy's Staff Holder](#)

[Chapter 1013 – The Will of the Li Palace](#)

[Chapter 1014 – There Has Never Been Only One Truth](#)

[Chapter 1015 – I Invite the White Emperor to See All Living Beings](#)

[Chapter 1016 – All Living Beings Are Suffering](#)

[Chapter 1017 – I Have Come to My City](#)

[Chapter 1018 – Miscellaneous Freeloaders, a Willingness to Pay Five Hundred Years](#)

[Chapter 1019 – We Wish to Invite You to Die](#)

[Chapter 1020 – The Grand Array of the Li Palace](#)

[Chapter 1021 – A Crane Brings a Storm to Shatter the Darkness](#)

[Chapter 1022 – Right Before the Eyes, Millions of Lightyears Away](#)

[Chapter 1023 – Sacred Light Shines over the Black Sea](#)

[Chapter 1024 – The Stone Sculpture Opens Its Eyes](#)

[Chapter 1025 – Trying One's Sword \(I\)](#)

[Chapter 1026 – Trying One's Sword \(II\)](#)

[Chapter 1027 – The Great Light Comes](#)

[Chapter 1028 – The True Final Move](#)

[Chapter 1029 – Two Streaks of Fire Tearing Through the Sky](#)

[Chapter 1030 – A Chat Between Lovers in the Clouds](#)

[Chapter 1031 – The Unhurried Tiger](#)

[Chapter 1032 – I Walked the Path You Used to Get Here](#)

[Chapter 1033 – The Bronze Mirror Breaks, the Daoist Exits](#)

[Chapter 1034 – Broken Feathers](#)

[Chapter 1035 – Plucking a Sword](#)

[Chapter 1036 – What Buddha Comes Now to Watch the Master Sleep](#)

[Chapter 1037 – The Warmth After Death](#)

[Chapter 1038 – In White Emperor City, Clouds Rush Out the Gate \(I\)](#)

[Chapter 1039 – In White Emperor City, Clouds Rush Out the Gate \(II\)](#)

[Chapter 1040 – The Hearts of Emperors Are All Wind and Snow](#)

[Chapter 1041 – I See](#)

[Chapter 1042 – Fierce the Cold Winds, Like Good Wine](#)

[Book 7: Dare to Order the Sun and Moon to Shine Over New Skies](#)

[Chapter 1043 – Good People Should Kill Bad People](#)

[Chapter 1044 – The Spring Breeze Sends Warmth to Join in Killing Su](#)

[Chapter 1045 – The Xu Estate of the Old Days](#)

[Chapter 1046 – She Says](#)

[Chapter 1047 – How Is This Good?](#)

[Chapter 1048 – A Very, Very Deep Place](#)

[Chapter 1049 – Returning to the Orthodox Academy](#)

[Chapter 1050 – The New Situation of the Orthodox Academy](#)

[Chapter 1051 – Cutting Off the Hand \(I\)](#)

[Chapter 1052 – Cutting Off the Hand \(II\)](#)

[Chapter 1053 – The Declaration of the New Orthodox Academy](#)

[Chapter 1054 – The Return of the Pope](#)

[Chapter 1055 – A Sage's Time](#)

[Chapter 1056 – A Devil's Decision](#)

[Chapter 1057 – His Holiness in the Sea of Light](#)

[Chapter 1058 – The Young Emperor](#)

[Chapter 1059 – Sugared Plums](#)

[Chapter 1060 – An Ordinary and Trifling Matter](#)

[Chapter 1061 – Beyond the World and the Starry Sky](#)

[Chapter 1062 – Your Hair's Disorderly](#)

[Chapter 1063 – A Good Person](#)

[Chapter 1064 – A Simple Mission](#)

[Chapter 1065 – A Fine Couple](#)

[Chapter 1066 – The Personnel Arrangements of the Li Palace](#)

[Chapter 1067 – Everyone Is Here](#)

[Chapter 1068 – Everything Began from White Emperor City](#)

[Chapter 1069 – The Tile on the Corner of the Roof](#)

[Chapter 1070 – The Fury of the Princes](#)

[Chapter 1071 – The Head of the Great Clan Who Has Shown Up](#)

[Chapter 1072 – That Master and Disciple Who Just Won't Come Out](#)

[Chapter 1073 – The Once More Reunited World](#)

[Chapter 1074 – The Once-More-Glimpsed Light of Morning](#)

[Chapter 1075 – A Great Spectacle](#)

[Chapter 1076 – The Man Shang Blocks the Path](#)

[Chapter 1077 – After That](#)

[Chapter 1078 – Held](#)

[Chapter 1079 – The First Person to Kill](#)

[Chapter 1080 – Blind Chess](#)

[Chapter 1081 – Please Do Not Repeat the Story from That Night](#)

[Chapter 1082 – Asking to Change the World](#)

[Chapter 1083 – She Can Do It, and So Can I](#)

[Chapter 1084 – Xu Yourong's Question](#)

[Chapter 1085 – Where the Dust Rises](#)

[Chapter 1086 – Where the Dust Falls](#)

[Chapter 1087 – Three Divisions of Cavalry on the March](#)

[Chapter 1088 – A Dragon Cry - Preview](#)

[Chapter 1089 – The Silent Spring Day](#)

[Chapter 1090 – A Goose's Footprint in the Melting Snow](#)

[Chapter 1091 – Chen Changsheng's Arrangements](#)

[Chapter 1092 – The Prerequisite of All Things](#)

[Chapter 1093 – Her Name](#)

[Chapter 1094 – Why Don't You Die?](#)

[Chapter 1095 – Let's Fight](#)

[Chapter 1096 – People Are Most Frightened to See Naivete](#)

[Chapter 1097 – A Koi of the Yellow River Quietly Sinking Down in the Dark Night](#)

[Chapter 1098 – You Don't Want to Try?](#)

[Chapter 1099 – Before the Fight](#)

[Chapter 1100 – The Location of the Fight Is Suddenly Changed!](#)